

**From:**

***The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader***  
**By John C. Maxwell**

C O U R A G E :  
O N E P E R S O N W I T H C O U R A G E  
I S A M A J O R I T Y

Courage is rightly esteemed the  
first of human qualities . . . because it is the  
quality which guarantees all others.

—*Winston Churchill, British Prime Minister*

Courage is fear that has said its prayers.

—*Karl Barth, Swiss Theologian*

## T H E A C E O F A C E S

What do these three men have in common: the auto racer who set the world speed record at Daytona in 1914, the pilot who recorded the highest number of victories in aerial combat against the Germans in World War I, and the secretary of war's special adviser who survived a plane crash and twenty-two days on a raft in the Pacific during World War II? They all lived through dangerous circumstances. They all displayed courage and steely nerves under duress. And they all happen to be the same person—Eddie Rickenbacker.

Meeting a challenge was never a big problem for Eddie Rickenbacker, whether it was physical, mental, or economic. When he was twelve, his father died, and he quit school to become the family's primary breadwinner. He sold newspapers, eggs, and goat's milk. He worked in a glass factory, brewery, shoe factory, and foundry. Then as a teenager, he started working as a race car mechanic, and at age twenty-two, he began racing. Two years later he set the world speed record.

When the United States entered World War I, Rickenbacker tried to enlist as an aviator, but he was overage and undereducated. So instead he entered as a chauffeur and then talked his superiors into sending him to flight training. Despite not fitting in with his college-educated fellow aviators, he excelled as a pilot. And by the time the war was over, he had logged 300 combat hours (the most of any American pilot), survived 134 aerial encounters with the enemy, claimed 26 kills, and earned the

Medal of Honor, eight Distinguished Service Crosses, and the French Legion of Honor. He was also promoted to captain and put in command of his squadron.

Rickenbacker's prowess in the air caused the press to dub him the "American Ace of Aces." When asked about his courage in combat, he admitted that he had been afraid. "Courage," he said, "is doing what you're afraid to do. There can be no courage unless you're scared."

That courage served the Ace of Aces well after World War I. In 1933, he became the vice president of Eastern Air Transport (later Eastern Airlines). Back then all airlines existed only because they were subsidized by the government. But Rickenbacker thought they should be self-sufficient. He decided to completely change the way the company did business. Within two years he made Eastern profitable, a first in aviation history. And when the president of the United States canceled all commercial carriers' air mail contracts, Rickenbacker took him on—and won. Rickenbacker led Eastern successfully for thirty years and retired at age seventy-three. When he died ten years later, his son, William, wrote, "If he had a motto, it must have been the phrase I've heard a thousand times: 'I'll fight like a wildcat!'"

#### F L E S H I N G I T O U T

When you look at the life of someone like Eddie Rickenbacker, you cannot help seeing great courage. It's easy to see in war heroes, but it's also present in every great leader in business,

government, and the church. Whenever you see significant progress in an organization, you know that the leader made courageous decisions. A leadership position doesn't give a person courage, but courage can give him a leadership position. That was true for Captain Eddie Rickenbacker.

Larry Osborne offers this observation: "The most striking thing about highly effective leaders is how little they have in common. What one swears by, another warns against. But one trait stands out: the willingness to risk."

As you approach the tough decisions that challenge you, recognize these truths about courage:

*1. Courage Begins with an Inward Battle*

Every test you face as a leader begins within you. The test of courage is no different. As psychotherapist Sheldon Kopp notes, "All the significant battles are waged within self." Courage isn't an absence of fear. It's doing what you are afraid to do. It's having the power to let go of the familiar and forge ahead into new territory. That was true for Rickenbacker, and it can be true for you.

*2. Courage Is Making Things Right, Not Just Smoothing Them Over*

Civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. declared, "The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy." Great leaders have good people skills,

and they can get people to compromise and work together. But they also take a stand when needed.

Courage deals with principle, not perception. If you don't have the ability to see when to stand up and the conviction to do it, you'll never be an effective leader. Your dedication to potential must remain stronger than your desire to appease others.

### *3. Courage in a Leader Inspires Commitment from Followers*

"Courage is contagious," asserts evangelist Billy Graham. "When a brave man takes a stand, the spines of others are stiffened." A show of courage by any person encourages others. But a show of courage by a leader inspires. It makes people want to follow him. My friend Jim Mellado explains, "Leadership is the expression of courage that compels people to do the right thing."

### *4. Your Life Expands in Proportion to Your Courage*

Fear limits a leader. Roman historian Tacitus wrote, "The desire for safety stands against every great and noble enterprise." But courage has the opposite effect. It opens doors, and that's one of its most wonderful benefits. Perhaps that's why British theologian John Henry Newman said, "Fear not that your life will come to an end but that it will never have a beginning." Courage not only gives you a good beginning, but it also provides a better future.

What's ironic is that those who don't have the courage to take risks and those who do, experience the same amount of fear in life. The only difference is that those who don't take chances

worry about trivial things. If you're going to have to overcome your fear and doubts anyway, you might as well make it count.

#### REFLECTING ON IT

Eleanor Roosevelt acknowledged, "You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You are able to say to yourself, 'I lived through this horror. I can take the next thing that comes along.' You must do the thing you think you cannot do."

How do you tend to handle fear? Do you embrace it? Are stretching experiences a regular part of your daily life? Or have you retreated so far into your comfort zone that you don't even feel fear? How must you change to develop a spirit of courage in your life?

#### BRINGING IT HOME

To improve your courage, do the following:

- *Face the music.* Go out and do something stretching simply for the sake of growing in courage. Skydive. Speak in front of an audience (most people's greatest fear). Perform in a play. Go white-water rafting. Rock climb. It doesn't matter what you do as long as it causes you to face a genuine fear.
- *Talk to that person.* Most people are avoiding confrontation with someone in their lives—an employee, a relative, or

a coworker. If that's true for you, talk to that person this week. Don't dump on him or abuse him. Speak the truth in love. (You won't be so afraid to do it if you've already sky-dived rafted, etc.)

- *Take a giant step.* Maybe you've been afraid to make a career move. If you've known in your heart that you should have changed jobs or started that new business, now is the time to face up to it. Take the time to really look at it. Talk to your spouse, your mentor, and a trusted friend or two. If it's the right thing to do, then *do it*.

D A I L Y T A K E - A W A Y

A nineteenth-century circuit-riding preacher named Peter Cartwright was preparing to deliver a sermon one Sunday when he was warned that President Andrew Jackson was in attendance, and he was asked to keep his remarks inoffensive. During that message, he included these statements: "I have been told that Andrew Jackson is in this congregation. And I have been asked to guard my remarks. What I must say is that Andrew Jackson will go to hell if he doesn't repent of his sin."

After the sermon, Jackson strode up to Cartwright. "Sir," the president said, "if I had a regiment of men like you, I could whip the world."

A courageous act often brings unexpected positive results.