



CHOOSE COURAGE

Step Into the Life You Want

Ruth M. Schimel, Ph.D.

CHOOSE COURAGE:
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Want

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ISBN-13: 978-1490343303

ISBN-10: 149034330X

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STEP ONE:

Imagining and Preparing for Your Own Journey

What to Expect

The frequent use of the word courage could descend into a heroic cliché captured in stories of other people, exhortations, and vague definitions from various celebrities. Yet more than 186 million current entries on Google show the word still attracts great attention. No doubt that's because it holds the promise of human possibility. For you, such numbers may suggest that too much has already been said about the subject, even if you could easily capture the essence of it all.

As conversations and writing about courage continue, though, they can help you attend to valuable unfinished business. *Choose Courage: Step Into the Life You Want* offers this opportunity in new, specific ways, while honoring your already proven strengths and efforts — whether or not you appreciate them fully.

From the Greeks onward, there seems to be no proven definition to help individuals discover and strengthen their own courage. Hunger for such a map to the power within persists — otherwise, you'd probably not be reading this.

Choose Courage is the first book to provide:

- a new, practical definition based on actual research that makes courage available to almost anyone

- ways for you to hear and confirm your courage through your *own* stories
- varied material you can dip into at any point that meets your needs and interests — life is not as linear as a book
- serious and lighthearted presentation, including digestible summaries, illustrations, photography, poetry, and attention to daily realities



© Photograph by Andrew Winter

Her high stretch reflects mental concentration, strength, and preparation.

Navigating these especially anxious times is easier done with hope and inspiration. This book also provides tailored assistance to promote your persistence.

Starting with your capacity for courage marks an efficient path to your powers and potential. As Winston Churchill said, “*Courage* is rightly esteemed the first of human qualities...because it is the quality which guarantees all others.”

The original definition of courage you’ll see a few pages later is based on the lives of everyday people. Instead of being a characteristic of just some special individuals or an isolated, dramatic act, the capacity for courage is within almost everyone. The process of becoming courageous is accessible to you regardless of education, gender, age, situation, or experience.

This book will suit you when you:

- are in transition
- seek greater meaning and feel curious about new possibilities in life and work
- believe your present situation and actions can be improved
- are tired of succumbing to fear, anxiety, and other limiting emotions
- progress best using ideas and tools appropriate to your own values and interests
- want to make intentional choices to improve your quality of life rather than just wait for chance or luck

However you relate to these opportunities, you may still wonder why another how-to book will make a positive difference when you’ve possibly already:

- read self-help and professional development books and articles, as well as taken workshops and courses

- completed your own self-improvement projects
- profited from participation in professional organizations and community groups
- consulted coaches, therapists, colleagues, family, or friends

Or maybe you've done none of this. No matter. To proceed, select what supports and engages you in *Choose Courage: Step Into the Life You Want*. Here you can expect to find guidance and inspiration to address what needs tending in your life. In the process, you'll learn *how to* access and express your courage, in your own ways.

To begin, let's be realistic. You'll probably never finish becoming your stronger self. When willing, you'll be empowering yourself and creating a better life over time. And even if there were a silver bullet, would you really want just one shot? Instead, you'll benefit from a range of opportunities and choices suited for changing needs, situations, and interests.

Use *Choose Courage* to realize more fully who you are and what you can do. You'll:

- build on whatever you've accomplished so far, starting from within where your real choices are
- go both wide and deep to catch what you want and need
- move beyond mulling to inspiring, manageable action

Let your capacity for courage and this book lead you forward using the following three processes.

How to act from the inside out

Rather than depend on other people's experiences for guidance and inspiration, you'll see how your courageous actions and abilities are apparent in your own stories. They already show your capacities, waiting to be tapped — again and again — as you take manageable steps. Given the natural twists, turns, and static aspects of life, though, don't expect rapid or linear progress.

But when you persist, have patience, and use your sense of humor, you'll release the flow of progress. You'll see results from identifying and building on your proven strengths. Your confidence will increase, creating a source for continuing action. Paradoxically, as you become stronger, you'll be more likely to receive the support you want and need because others are attracted to your apparent potential and powers.

How to access your courage: what you'll find within

The new definition is a gift that keeps on giving because you can invoke your courage whenever you choose. As a process of becoming, courage involves:

- *the willingness to realize your true capacities*
- *by going **through** discomfort, fear, anxiety, or suffering*
- *and taking wholehearted, responsible action.*

Intellectual, ethical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of this definition honor your whole self. Courage moves from what some consider a manly virtue to a universal one.

Choose Courage also explores the underlying meaning of courage based on heart. Connections with emotional vulnerability, openness, and inner strength reflect some of its rich paradoxes and complexities — as well as what really goes on in daily life.

(You'll find further discussion of the original research and ideas that support this definition throughout the book.)

How to make the flexible format meet your needs

Books are linear, lives are not. *Choose Courage* is therefore designed so you can select any sequence that works for you. Though the new definition of courage provides a clear road map, the book offers multiple routes to suit various situations and styles. Your time is respected; useful guidance is available at any point without reading the whole book. As Little Jack Horner did in the nursery rhyme, just stick in your thumb (or any finger) at any point and pull out a plum.



Little Jack Horner, Illustration by William Wallace (1902).
Image is in the public domain believed to be free to use without restriction in the US.

An array of tools provides different alternatives for finding what works for you. Many can stand alone, available for separate use or in combination according to your needs. The voyage includes short “rest stops” for comfort, consideration, and exercise. Food metaphors and illustrations add humor, variety, and other psychic and sensual nutrition.



© Photograph by Zeke Mekonnen

Even gentle gorillas take regular time out to think and restore themselves; studies show apes can set goals and follow through on them.

So read and use *Choose Courage* in the sequence presented if that works for you. Or find in the table of contents and index whatever Step, subject, or section meets your specific needs and interests at a particular time. You can also just flip or scan the pages to see what catches your fancy. Using any approach that appeals, choose the speed and depth that works well for you.

As you create and enjoy your own rhythm of attention and action, the benefits will bring optimism and energy for continuing efforts. Since issues and opportunities often span professional and

personal situations, your progress in one sphere can enrich the other. Just tune in fairly regularly to sustain momentum. As you no doubt have experienced, the more consistent your efforts, the more likely you'll see results.

Possibilities for you

Throughout, *Choose Courage* shows you many ways forward, not one best way. Such variety attends to your unique qualities, needs, situations, and interests.



Find or create variety even when forms may seem similar.

How to proceed may not always be obvious until you find something that encourages your action. Neither will quick fixes be likely or even appropriate. But each step you take will at least hold an opportunity for learning, practice, and progress. Over time,

your self-respect strengthens. Delight and fun are part of this process that brings additional joy to your life.

Choose Courage is designed to take you beyond mulling, reading, and discussing. It recognizes that at some point just getting ready to move forward, without some follow through, can be self-deluding.

Benefit from the book's focus on *action* related to your needs, goals, and interests. Use the ideas, examples, and tools whole; alternatively, adapt or save them for another time. Do ignore aspects that don't speak to you. You won't find an imperious insistence on "just do it," which you obviously would have done already if you wanted to or could.

If something is not working for you, move on. Let each choice tell you something about what's important. That could help smooth your way through sometimes challenging situations. By all means, celebrate any progress in ways you'll enjoy.

Here is an outline of the six Steps of *Choose Courage* to use in whatever order works for you:

Step One Imagining and Preparing for Your Journey: prepares you for action, answering why you should bother to access your capacity for courage. It shows how an array of often messy, uncontrollable influences makes life naturally complex. In spite of them, attention is given to where you might make a difference and how you may choose to act.



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***Though only a one-foot tall lookout for the clan,
like this meerkat maybe you can at least look out
for yourself and others.***

Step Two Getting Ready to Express Your Courage: helps you get ready to realize your courage through being authentic, entrusting yourself to someone or something beyond you through commitment, appreciating the emotions that energize your passions, and expressing yourself through what you value, or vocation.

Step Three Identifying Internal Barriers to Progress: shows how to identify and start to wrestle with internal barriers to progress, including discomfort, fear, anxiety, guilt, suffering, and imprints from the past.

Step Four Surpassing Internal Barriers: provides concrete ways to transcend internal barriers, releasing hope and energy for productive action and progress.

Step Five Expressing Your Own Courage: explains the new definition of courage based on original research, how it emerges, and a range of choices to make it work for you. You'll see how to access and appreciate your courage through your own stories.



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Bridges go both ways. Just choose a direction that works for you.

Note: If interested in an extended metaphor of what courageous action entails see David McCullough's 2012 update of "The Great Bridge, the Epic Story of the Building of the Brooklyn Bridge" for an entrancing study of technology, human effort, and art.

Step Six Taking Action: supports your continuing voyage of choosing courage through strengthening cycles and additional opportunities for action. It includes reminders of the range of your own powers that contribute to meaning, engagement, and effective results.

Why Bother?

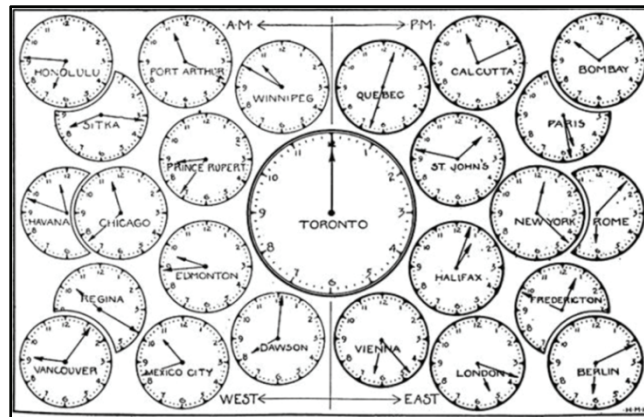
It takes courage to grow up and become who you really are.

Poet, e.e. cummings

Bother because “nobody does it better,” to adopt Carly Simon’s well-known lyric. You know yourself best. And who has the strongest interest in your welfare?

You are also more likely to stay motivated to create the life you want. Certainly, family, teachers, colleagues, friends, partners, professional service providers, and mentors may contribute. Yet without your own insight and action, their assistance and commitment goes only so far.

“A limit of time is fixed for thee,” according to Roman emperor-philosopher Marcus Aurelius. Unless reincarnation exists, making the most of your precious time on earth is in your hands. Intuitively you know how to use it well — and can get even better at it with practice. Making authentic choices will increase your powers and possibilities.



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Finally, bodies and minds are designed for development. Otherwise, there can be a tendency toward stasis, immobility, and loss of possibilities, whatever one's age.

The inside argument for why bother honors the value of your energy and motivation for choice and action. The outside argument is change happens anyway, whether wanted or not. Without it, in fact, life would be quite predictable and likely boring.

"I could deal with boring," you say. Test that by remembering what has happened when you stayed stuck in your comfort zone. Did you eventually yearn for something, without knowing exactly what? The German *sehnsucht* for that captures in one word a feeling of intense yearning for something missing. That sense could disrupt seeming ease or even a successful life.



However pleasant and relaxing, how long would you want to remain in such a scene without it losing attraction? How long before you want to move, to act?

Whether or not you've felt such a yearning, your actual and symbolic muscles could weaken from disuse. How might you and others see you and your capabilities under such circumstances?

Success

Choose Courage addresses both the inside and outside arguments for “why bother.” This foundation helps you see how to influence situations, to shift them in your favor. It will help you know when to let go, plan, or adjust expectations. One way to prepare is to think about what a good outcome in a particular situation means to you. Some might call that success.

Just take about five minutes to jot down your own one or two definitions for success or what a good outcome in a particular situation would mean to you now. Your choices can be used for many purposes as well as to affirm or clarify a direction you choose now or later.

To encourage your exploration, here are tangible and intangible examples of what success might include:

- learning how to do something that brings you pleasure, meaning, or valuable results
- inspiring others to realize their strengths
- earning the money to support and sustain the life you want
- making a difference in or influencing your world
- creating a product, service, or art form that attracts, engages, or inspires others
- leading a family, group, community, or organization for everyone’s benefit

Or see what you want to take away or adapt from American essayist and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson’s definition of success:

To laugh often and much; to win the respect of intelligent people and affection of children; to earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the

betrayal of false friends; to appreciate beauty; to find the best in others; to leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition; to know even one life has breathed easier because I have lived. This is to have succeeded.

Notice neither the bulleted list above nor Ralph Waldo Emerson's definition mentions money in itself. That's because research shows money alone may not sustain happiness, another measure of success to some. In fact, little of importance tends to stay the same over time, whether money, happiness, health, relationships, work, or success. Any can shift, ebbing and flowing, temporarily satisfying appetites that eventually yearn for that often insatiable four-letter word — more. Or different or better.

About money: Though disdainful of his view at the time, I remember my father saying it can mess up life. Too little, and frustrations and fears abound. Too much, however you define that, requires spending a lot of time figuring out what to do with it: protecting it and getting more of it. These concerns do not even address dealing with related anxieties as well as people who want a piece of your resources or your rich self.

Surfeit of money and other important things can lead to boredom for lack of challenge or obsessive accumulation of new things. That could result in endless cycles of repetition. A feeling of “is this all there is?” reminds of the emptiness of constantly filling up. Such results show why starting from the inside, or knowing who you are and can be as well as what you truly want, can be a firmer foundation for a good life. Money and other material markers of success alone may just not be enough to build and sustain a life of meaning, security, and pleasure.

Failure

Considering how you define success may also bring failure to mind. But avoiding action or over thinking possible and actual failures can waste precious time. Both choices will likely postpone progress.

Should you find yourself focusing on past or expected failure, use any of the following questions to create strategies to avoid it and take effective action now:

- What one important lesson can you learn from previous detours and regrets?
- What specifically do you want to accomplish now?
- What main action can you take to promote a concrete, worthwhile outcome?
- What important information must you know or learn about to help decide when to continue with or quit a situation?
- How much time and resources are reasonable to devote?
- Who will help you progress?

Choose one or two of these questions that could elicit better ways to proceed or others that occur. Jot down some answers and ideas that immediately come to mind. From your brief notes, identify a few options, perhaps exploring them with someone you trust and respect. To activate your investment of thought and time in avoiding failure or something similar, take your first modest step within the next one or two days.