Courageous Leadership: Author Interview

Bill Treasurer is the founder and “Chief Encouragement Officer” of Giant Leap Consulting, a courage-building company. He is also the author of Pfeiffer’s new facilitator training toolkit, Courageous Leadership: Using Courage to Transform the Workplace. Bill is widely considered to be the originator of the new organizational development practice of courage-building. He is also the author of Courage Goes to Work (Berrett-Koehler, 2008), an internationally best-selling book about how to apply courage in the workplace. Since founding Giant Leap in 2002, Bill has taught courage-building workshops across the globe for such organizations as UBS Bank, Blue Cross and Blue Shield, ASTD, Monster.com, the Center for Creative Leadership, Walsh Construction, PNC Bank, NASA, the National Science Foundation, the US Forest Service, and the US Department of Veterans Affairs.

Question: Giant Leap Consulting, is a “courage-building company.” What does that mean?

Treasurer: My personal mission and the mission of Giant Leap are one in the same: to help people and organizations be more courageous. The workplace is a bastion of fear, especially in tough economic times – like right now. When anxiety is high, performance suffers. Our premise is this: people perform better and with higher morale and engagement when they are operating out of confidence, courage, and conviction than when they are operating out of fear and anxiety. Simply put, where would you rather work, in a company where people are full of fear or full of courage?

Why is building courage important in the workplace setting?

Treasurer: During the last few years, the world has experienced an unusual amount of anxiety-provoking situations, including the economic meltdown, numerous wars, the constant threat of terrorism, toppling of governments, and multiple natural disasters. All of this has served to stoke people’s fears. While challenging times are supposed to call forth the best of a leader’s character, there have been too many instances when the opposite has been true. Too many leaders and managers transmit their own fears as the primary means of motivating people to get things done. Even if the world were stable and our leaders acted with more decency, there are countless work situations that can either inspire fear or activate our courage. For example, courage is needed when you are making budget requests to upper level executives. Courage is needed when admitting you made a big-dollar mistake to a valued client. Courage is needed when taking on a new role that requires learning new skill sets. Courage is needed when you have to adjust to a new boss after your old boss has moved on. Courage is needed when launching a new product or opening a new division. All of those situations require dealing with a tremendous amount of anxiety and fear. The common
response to fear and anxiety is to hunker down and play it safe. When everyone is preoccupied with playing it safe, the business is in real danger. Because the workplace is such a bastion of fear, it makes it right (and ripe) for the application of courage.

**How did the idea of acting courageously become important to you?**

**Treasurer:** To answer that question, I have to go back to before I founded Giant Leap Consulting, before the six years I spent as an executive coach with Accenture, and before graduate school. Before all of that, I was a professional high diver, and traveled all around the world as a member of the U.S. High Diving Team. During that time I performed more than fifteen hundred dives from heights that scaled to more than one hundred feet, traveling at speeds in excess of fifty miles an hour before hitting small pools that were only ten feet deep. But here is the thing: I’m a high diver who is afraid of heights.

I was able to work through my profound fear of heights through the patience of a coach who held me accountable to my own potential. By helping me deal with incrementally higher heights, and by helping me learn to walk *through* discomfort instead of running *away* from it, he built my courage. It was such a powerful and life-changing experience for me that I decided to make building people’s courage my life’s mission. The reality is *all* people—personally and professionally—face high dives. I see it as my job to help them build the courage to leap off their platforms of safety. The new Courageous Leadership program is designed to do that.

**Why did you write the Courageous Leadership facilitator program, and what is it designed to do?**

**Treasurer:**

Now anyone, in any organization, can build courage within their own organization and conduct their own courage-building workshops, by purchasing *Courageous Leadership: A Program for Using Courage to Transform the Workplace*. The toolkit is truly comprehensive. It contains all the courage-building materials that I’ve been using for over a decade, including multiple workshop agendas, facilitator scripts, and even two different PowerPoint presentations. There’s even a module about how to get senior executives to support the idea of building workplace courage. To learn more, go to www.pfeiffer.com/go/courage.

My greatest hope is that more managers and leaders will start seeing themselves as courage-builders, and will start driving out fear from the workplace. Our organizations need more courageous workers, not more anxiety!