

## What Makes A Good Leader: **COURAGE**

This week is the third installment of our series on the four key pillars of character required of successful leaders (nobility, humility, courage, and compassion), as delineated by Lt Gen Steven Kwast, AETC/CC. In that we are *all* leaders in some form, at some time, and with some people—and because the development of these characteristics is a journey, rather than something with which we're born—this series of 5M2Ts focuses on each of these traits. Next up: **Courage**.

Courage is inherent in everything we do as leaders; I argue that without it, we could not be deemed *leaders* at all. Courageous leaders are willing to take calculated risks, to do what's right (vs. what's popular), and to make difficult decisions, often with incomplete data. To demonstrate courage in this way is not to be fearless; rather, it is the audacity to act *despite* great fear.

Our human history is replete with examples of people whose gallantry embodied the height of courage...but few of us will ever have an opportunity to exhibit such valiant heroism. Everyday courage, the more-frequently-experienced variety, is far more important. It's characterized in resistance to peer pressure. Standing up to a (schoolhouse or workplace) bully. Challenging the status quo. Taking a bold risk despite the possibility of failure.

Owning an unpopular opinion. Dropping the façade and being vulnerable with others, especially before being assured you can trust them. Stepping outside of your social comfort zone.

Admitting when you're wrong. Trying strange new things.

Saying "yes" when it's more comfortable to say "no." Saying "no" when it means letting another person down, even when

your *need to please* cries out in opposition. Getting up early to workout, when you'd much rather stay in bed. Asking out that guy/gal. Stepping into the ring (i.e. meeting with the boss) whilst knowing you're about to get pummeled. Taking a chance, and knowing you might fail. Being scared to take charge, and doing it anyway.



We face great opportunities for courage every day. When we act on them, others notice. More importantly, we build upon that courage within ourselves, becoming ever braver (stronger) for it.

- **Stand up for your beliefs.** With nobility comes conviction to act with justice and morality. Hold true to what you believe is right, especially when it's not the prevailing or accepted cultural standard. Setting the unwavering expectation for goodness can spark lasting change.
- **Don't back down from a challenge.** Embrace the difficult, and leverage others' strengths to aid you in achieving your shared goals. But know failure (a learning opportunity) is an option.
- **Try something new...** especially if what you've done thus far hasn't gotten you any closer to your goal(s). Take a chance with a new direction—that's how we learn, grow, and innovate. This applies to your personal life, too; experiment with yoga, Thai food, D&D, or slam poetry!