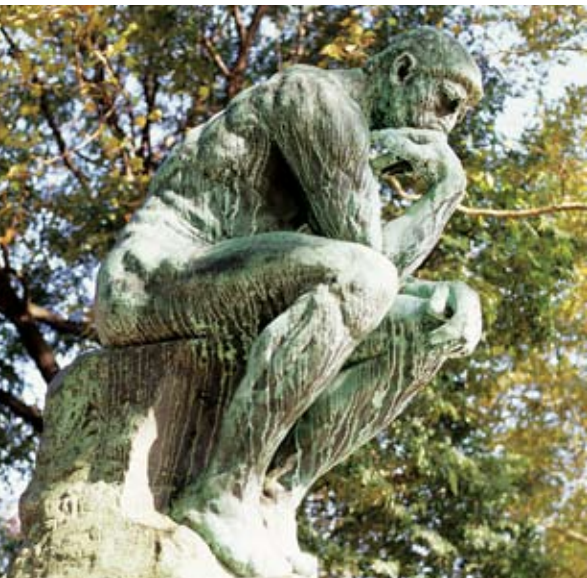


COURAGEOUS LEADERSHIP BY KENNETH A. "BUZZ" SHAW

FOCUS INWARD



Nothing feels better than being complimented for making a courageous decision. But the flip side can make any leader feel badly about his or her efforts — the accusation of having committed a cowardly act. In my day

I have been accused of both, and often it is the same decision, leading credence to the old axiom that "Where you stand depends on where you sit." Some would regard the furloughing of employees under today's financial difficulties as a brave act. Going against conventional wisdom, the leader decides to plan for tomorrow and maintain cohesion by putting all of his or her members in the same boat. Others would see the decision as cowardly because, "the leader won't bite the bullet when hard decisions are necessary."

Unfortunately, many difficult decisions end up this way. Depending on your level of self-awareness, you

might believe that you deserve to be mentioned in the updated version of "Profiles in Courage" because so many laud your bravery. Or if you are inclined toward self-loathing, you might convince yourself to try out for the cowardly lion part in the "Wizard of Oz".

Here is the point. It is a bad idea to focus outward when making difficult decisions. Of course it is necessary to consult others and to understand the consequences of your decision. But at the end of the day it is up to you, one of the loneliest aspects of leadership. And you need to listen to your inner voice, not the many external voices that insist you prove your courage

So, what constitutes a courageous decision? There are three parts: the degree of personal and professional risk you are taking, the value system that guides your decision making and the good of your company or organization.

When there is little personal or professional risk, decision making is a lot easier. And when the final decision coincides with one's own personal values and what is good for the organization, it is a no-brainer. It is when the three pieces collide that things get dicey. The morally "right" decision that puts you at risk, the personally advantageous decision that is counter to your beliefs, the organizationally "right" decision that doesn't fit with your values, all have the potential for courageous decision making.

The opportunity to make courageous decisions confronts us all, not just those in leadership positions. But we can learn from some public examples, recently and throughout history. Here is a sampler.

Sherron Watkins, the vice president of corporate development at Enron Corp., who informed her boss, Ken Lay, that the company was no more than a large Ponzi scheme. She was fired for her contraire views, but has done quite well on the lecture circuit.

The late Pat Tilman, the professional football player who left football to serve in the U.S. Army and made the ultimate sacrifice.

Texas hero Sam Houston who opposed that Texas' secession from the Union prior to the Civil War. He was later voted out of the office of Governor.

Harriet Tubman, the Underground Railroad leader who made more than 19 trips to the South escorting over 300 slaves to freedom.

Make your own list of courageous decisions from the more visible to the daily decisions we humans must make. My short list of unnoticed but courageous decision-makers includes:

- The minister who resists congregational leader pressure to build a bigger church when parishioners' needs aren't unmet.
- The new mother who takes extended leave from her job knowing that it will affect her chances for advancement.
- The employee who says no to a request that he or she do something illegal.
- The college administrator who stands behind the concept of academic freedom when an unpopular speaker is invited to campus.

My list isn't important, but your list is because it will define your decision-making. It will be there to guide you before making that difficult decision and after when it is clear that you got mixed reviews. And know this. If you do your job right, this will happen. **E**

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Kenneth A. "Buzz" Shaw also makes his expertise available to the public through his Web site, <http://whitman.syr.edu/shaw/>, which includes videos, articles, podcasts, speeches and presentations for leaders and business professionals.