



A Recipe for Managerial Courage

by Matt Minahan

Take a look at Courage -- from a recipe concocted in an OD kitchen. You might well want to share this article with a client who will put on an apron and go to work creating a new dish.

It is hard to define managerial courage. It's one of those qualities that defies easy containment, and yet, like art, we say we know it when we see it. So, if we can't define it, how do we recognize it? And, an even better question, how do we practice it?

When practiced well, managerial courage is a like a good stew – full of strong and potent flavors, each of which is recognizable on its own, and, when blended with other ingredients, yields its identity to the larger potion.

Some of the ingredients for this culinarius courage include:

- Three parts imagination and vision of a better future;
- Three parts commitment to a goal that is worthy and challenging;
- Two parts humility
- Two parts strength with personal confidence
- Two parts excitement about new challenges;
- Two parts compassion for those negatively affected;
- One part stubbornness and unwillingness to let go
- One part ego and pride
- One part sense of humor

As with any good recipe, some of the ingredients can be substituted with others, but there are a few critical ingredients, without which the courage does not rise, in fact, falls flat. Of course, those decisions are best made by the cook at the moment of mixture. There are a few replacements that won't compromise the courageous outcome too much, AND there are a few ingredients that are indispensable,

Commitment to a goal that is worthy and challenging is the sine qua non for this recipe, and if you can't find it anywhere in your kitchen, courage is not the dish to serve. For the cook who is not committed, or for whom the goal is not worthy or challenging, attempts to be courageous fall flat, and ultimately devolve into stubbornness or over-protectiveness. Without a worthy and challenging goal, the cook has no way to select a recipe, and without that ingredient, the courage dish does not rise to the occasion, ending up with a bitter and unpleasant aftertaste.

Two other requirements for this courage dish are **humility** and **compassion** for those negatively affected. It's rare to find a kitchen that has no trace of either, and the courage dish can be made with marginal proportions, but the result will be a courage dish that tastes strident, even to the point of being obnoxious. However, when there is neither humility nor compassion for those negatively affected, this dish results in arrogance, a lack of resiliency, and brittleness.

As important as **imagination** and **vision** of a better future seem, it's actually not critical to this recipe. It adds the flavor of leadership to the courage, which fundamentally changes the flavor of this mix, but without it, the overall shape and texture of courage doesn't change.

This courage recipe will lose some of its spice and flavor, but the dish will ultimately be recognizable if lacking the excitement ingredient. In the end, excitement is an important condiment in this mix, but isn't a make-or-break ingredient. Some of the best, most courageous people in the workplace can accomplish immense feats both in public and private without the spark of excitement. This type of courage doesn't easily breed commitment in others and may not be pleasing to all palettes, but it certainly looks and smells and tastes like courage.

The last four ingredients, even in small proportions, are crucial to this courage concoction, and it would be almost impossible to recognize courage if any of the following were missing:

Strength with personal confidence and a bit of **stubbornness and unwillingness to let go**, are necessary or our courage dish loses its impact and drive, becomes indistinguishable from other leadership aperitifs, and leaves us hungry again within minutes.

Ego and **pride** both have negative connotations in today's work world, but in fact, it is impossible to act with courage without them. When the cook isn't personally invested in the cooking or doesn't believe that the dish is a personal reflection of her or his work, commitment comes into question. That personal stake in the outcome is an important ingredient in the courage mix, because without it, we are less likely to drive toward success. It is precisely because the taste of the serving reflects on the chef and her or his competence that it is exactly a matter of the chef's ego and pride.

Finally, **a sense of humor** might seem an optional ingredient in this courage mix, but in the end, it's a critical ingredient that keeps the cook from taking her or himself too seriously. Even if you don't have the "these-are-the-jokes-folks" kind of humor on hand, it is important to have some humor handy, to help the cook maintain a sense of proportion in the kitchen.

Taken together, this recipe for managerial courage is a powerful and tasty concoction, and every good cook has her or his own way of mixing and flavoring it. But like all the best recipes, it thrives in the ways it is passed on to other cooks.

How does your courage recipe cook up, and have you passed it along to others?

Matt Minahan, Ed.D, is president of Matt Minahan & Associates, a small consulting firm in Silver Spring, MD. He specializes in strategic planning and organization design, and teaches group development at Johns Hopkins University. Matt can be reached at: matt@minahangroup.com.

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