



*Helping leaders and organizations live up to their promise*

## For Neda

Monitoring the post-Iran election craziness, the inspiration for this e-connect came pretty quickly: Courage. I've written about courage before (<http://www.integro-inc.com/volume5.htm>) and many others have covered the subject, but perhaps we can't say enough about it. As I watched the footage of Neda bleeding to death from Iranian police gunfire and hundreds of others clubbed and rounded up for God-knows-what punishment, I couldn't help asking myself what I would be willing to risk so much for. Fortunately in the U.S., other than serving in the armed forces it's been a long time since we've had to put life or limb at risk for freedom - at least the kind of freedom that Iranians are fighting for. What do we say we value most, and if the time came, what would we have the courage to put at risk for its sake?

If not the big life and liberty issues faced by Iranians and many others around the world these days, there are adequate opportunities for each of us to exercise courage on a day-to-day basis - courage to act or speak out for a principle, for a cause, for others or for whatever we value most. How would things be different if more had the courage sooner to speak out about signs of shaky business models, deteriorating markets or questionable business practices? How might things be different in our own lives or careers if we could summon the courage to speak or act at times that we don't?

As I think about courage, I remember James Thurber's advice: that periodically in our lives we need to take stock of "what we are running to and what we may be running from." Are we clear enough about what we are "running to" - what we value or desire most - to help us summon the courage that we need to act? When we fail to act, what might we be running from? Maybe we're afraid of looking or sounding foolish; how bad would that be compared to the consequences of not acting or speaking up? Maybe we're afraid of being wrong or making a mistake; how bad would that be really, and are we confusing making mistakes with learning?

Our word "courage" is derived from the French "couer," and literally means "of the heart." That makes sense since like our heart, courage grows with exercise; we exercise it with matters of smaller significance as we build up "strength of heart" for more consequential matters: A person with an unhealthy dependence first finds the courage to forego the dependency one day, then a week, then months, then years. We find the strength to voice unpopular opinions first in small meetings with peers, then in meetings with our boss and eventually in large groups where the stakes are even higher. An organization first chooses a supplier more aligned with its core values at a slight inconvenience, then works its way to finding strategic partnerships with more ethical suppliers even though short-term it means a competitive disadvantage and a hit in stock price.

- *What are you or your organization "running to" - that you value or desire most? What are you willing to give up or put at risk for that?*
- *Is there anything you're "running from" that prevents you from summoning the courage you need to speak up, stand up or act on behalf of what you value? What's the worst that can happen if you overcome your fear and act? What's the best thing, and will that be worth it?*
- *What needs to be said or done right now that requires courage on your or your organization's part? What can you do to summon the courage that you and others need, and whose or what support can you enlist?*

Much courage is called for today. Some will be on a grand scale like we're witnessing in Iran; some will be very different, nevertheless important forms - like courage to speak up for what's right at work, courage to live with a serious illness, courage to manage significant downsizing or simply courage to persevere. May we find the inspiration, strength, support and resources to do what needs to be done despite our fears.

“The paradox of courage is that we must be a little careless of our life in order to keep it.”

G. K. Chesterton

“Physical courage, which despises all danger, will make one brave in one way; and moral courage, which despises all opinion, will make one brave in another.”

Charles Caleb Colton

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AI

AI Watts  
inTEgro, Inc.  
[www.integro-inc.com](http://www.integro-inc.com)  
ph: (612) 827-2363