

Courage or Cruise

Nelson A. Rockefeller said, “Wherever we look upon this earth, the opportunities take shape within the problems”. Every day we are presented with opportunity. But opportunity doesn’t always come as a great moment, all wrapped up with a bow to make it obvious that it is right for us. Sometimes these opportunities are in disguise. Sometimes they look like hard work, or even feel scary. And sometimes, when times get tough, it feels easier to just go with the flow and let the situation control us.

Instead of taking charge when times are tough, we might decide to be the passenger, and just see where we end up. In this way, we are cruising through our lives, hiding away from the challenges of tougher times; letting the environment dictate where we end up. So how do we summon the courage to lead ourselves, with clear direction, into uncharted waters, where both great achievements and substantial failures may await?

For most of us, it’s not too difficult to embrace the obvious opportunities as they arise. The much desired job promotion or the anxiously anticipated marriage proposal, for instance, can be opportunities that we are keen to welcome. Does our enthusiasm for the task make the path we take easy? Not necessarily. But if we are truly positive about it, it will feel right, even when times get tough.

So what about those life changes that are thrust upon us, rather than designed or chosen? How do we find the opportunities in the turmoil? It takes real courage to find opportunities within an unwelcome, chaotic situation. It might be life changing turmoil like a divorce, or a redundancy. If these types of situations are thrust on you against your will, it’s normal for it to feel completely wrong, especially at first. And it doesn’t have to be dramatically life changing either. It might just be a change in a friendship or moderate alterations in your work environment, such as a new boss or a restructure. But if the changes are not what you think you want, your first response might be resistance. You might not even think to look for opportunities.

When encouraged or forced by others to move in a direction we are naturally resisting, it can feel very uncomfortable. The


current reality, the situation you have been used to, is deconstructing before your very eyes. At this point, it can be difficult to see that any new beginning might be better than the reality you have known. But it’s important to understand that the sooner we embrace the deconstruction, and take charge of it, the sooner we can begin to create a new reality that works better for us. Rather than leaving it up to others, we need to have the courage to construct the new environment that we want.

To do this, there are a number of facts that we need to understand. Firstly, we need to recognise that our fear of the unknown is normal. Resistance is usually borne from fear; of the unknown, of failure, of change. Once we understand and accept that fear is part of the process, this can help us overcome the discomfort that comes with an unknown future. Overcoming hesitation borne of fear requires significant mental strength. Understanding why we are afraid and exactly what we are afraid of, will help us begin to imagine the potential future we desire.

From here, we have the opportunity to start to actually shape our unknown future, into something that we desire. It’s a clean slate. And the more we work towards our desired future, the less we have to fear. We can start to look for the opportunities to create the future we want, that will work for our needs at that time.

It also helps to understand that sometimes plans won’t come to fruition. Sometimes we will succeed in the opportunities we seek. Sometimes we won’t. And that’s ok. There will always be something to be gained, learned or understood from your best attempt. You just have to be open to seeing it.

Unfortunately, the majority of the opportunities open to us pass us by, often unrecognised. We literally don’t notice them staring us in the face. Yet, embracing the right opportunity at the right time can be life changing. And the right time is not necessarily referring to those times in your life when things are going smoothly. Sometimes the right time is simply that moment when you are able to see the opportunity right before you.

Wayne Gretzky said “You miss 100% of the shots you never take”. The choices we make literally shape our lives. We choose courage or we choose to cruise. So, next time you are faced with a situation which, at first glance, appears to be out of your control, what will you choose? Courage or cruise? 

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