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How to Be Bold, The Surprising Science of Everyday Courage

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"The author, Ranjay Gulati, is the Paul R. Lawrence MBA Class of 1942 Professor of Business Administration and the former Unit Head of the Organisational Behaviour Unit at Harvard Business School."

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Understanding Everyday Courage

Can one develop courage, or is it something people are born with? Professor Ranjay Gulati, in his latest book titled 'How to Be Bold, The Surprising Science of Everyday Courage', explores the topic of boldness and courage in the face of uncertainty. He is the researcher on the subject of organisational behaviour, leadership and strategic management at Harvard Business School (HBS). The author explains the concept of courage as the ability to take bold actions toward achieving a goal despite feeling dread and fear. He opines that every individual has the ability to develop boldness. The author uses real-world cases to explain the concept. He further uses a poignant example from his life to highlight the fact that boldness and courage can be achieved even in the face of dire circumstances. Using these methods, Professor Gulati provides the reader a roadmap for cultivating courage. He also discusses how developing courage results in personal and organisational development.

In his previous book, Deep Purpose (Penguin Business, 10 February 2022), the author had

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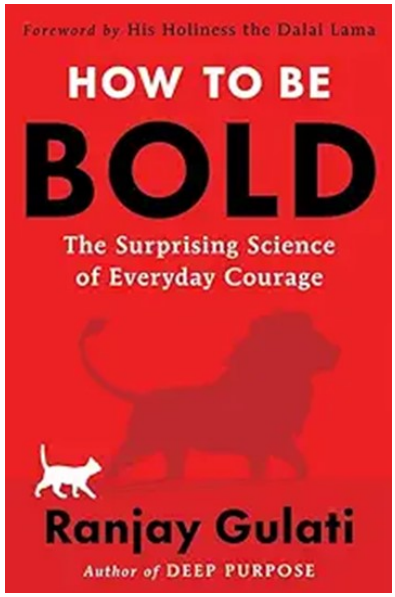

used storytelling and cutting-edge research as techniques to explain the concepts. He implies a similar technique in his latest book to provide the reader with the knowledge to help understand the concepts of courage and boldness. Courage has been defined by various philosophers as a characteristic or an inherent personality trait. Professor Gulati explains that humans are genetically wired to respond to danger and that allows them to be courageous. The author provides historical context in which our survival was based on avoiding dangers rather than confronting them head-on. In the current times, courage is defined not by our ability to survive in nature but through everyday decisions that we make in the face of uncertainty. This is applicable in our professional and personal lives. Professor Gulati further elucidates that we are currently living in an 'age of uncertainty', characterised by economic disruptions, market volatility, health crises, environmental issues, geopolitical upheavals, and the rapid technological changes.

The '9 C's Framework

In relation to modern times defined by uncertainty, the author presents a fascinating concept of '9C's'. The author believes that these Cs will help readers live a fulfilling and meaningful life. These are bifurcated into two sets: the first set relates to the individual level, and the second set is associated with collective courage. The first set includes tools for coping with uncertainty, increasing confidence, committing to a higher purpose, making connections with other people, leading by greater comprehension and understanding, and staying calm in the face of adversity. The latter set of Cs is associated with building clanship (team), projecting charisma, and changing the culture of an organisation. All these are perceived to create an atmosphere of courage. This

acts as a catalyst for people to make bold decisions as a team. This framework is consistent with Professor Gulati's argument that courage is a muscle that can be developed in the face of uncertainty. In today's personal and professional life, we are witnessing that leaders, managers, researchers and practitioners are experiencing high levels of uncertainty and volatility at both global and national levels. Professor Gulati argues in the book that courage is a characteristic not only of selected few individuals. Albeit it is a skill that can be developed by any individual by appropriately using tools that are used in training their mind.

A foreword by his Holiness the Dalai Lama in this book provides a spiritual and humanistic touch. This book review provides a summary of Professor Gulati's tools for helping in being bold and courageous. It also provides a critical analysis of the same.

The Uncertainty Crisis and Micro-action Planning

The author introduces an interesting concept of 'uncertainty crisis'. He defines it as a major problem afflicting our modern society. He begins his argument by sharing that in the past, the threats faced by humans were mostly physical threats. But today, these threats are no longer physical; instead, they are largely related to uncertainty. The author provides examples of such threats in the face of maintaining one's reputation and upholding relationships and careers. For instance, one might be fearful of speaking freely with the boss, making a difficult decision at the workplace, giving an important talk to the colleagues, or selecting a career move at an opportune time. According to Professor Gulati, uncertainty falls into one of three categories: 'freeze', 'fight', and 'flight'. 'Freeze' is a phenomenon characterised by a feeling of helplessness. 'Fight' is associated with by defensiveness. The concept of 'flight' signifies a desire to avoid discomfort, and it is the least common response.

The author feels that fearlessness should not lead to people acting against their own emotions. He presents the concept of courage as a basic skill that humans can develop. He uses many examples from the fields of leadership, entrepreneurship, activism, and athletics. People from these diverse fields have overcome fearlessness and developed courage by identifying their fear triggers and taking action against them.

The author discusses the approaches of what he defines as 'micro-action planning'. This is associated with taking manageable risks and developing a psychological and emotional safety net. The tactics explained by the author on managing risks are based on empirical research. This research also includes theories from the fields of cognitive behavioural therapy and behavioural economics. Professor Gulati highlights the importance of taking small, actionable steps to develop courage over time. He is critical of taking these actions in one large step. Thus, this book contributes by providing practical suggestions for business leaders, managers, and educators towards developing courageous behaviour skills in leadership and everyday practice.

The author establishes that self-efficacy affects both fear responses and courageous behaviour. Professor Gulati emphasises that courageous individuals often act based on the stories that they create about themselves and their perceived challenges. He uses the example of U.S. Airways Flight 1549, the airline that was commanded by Captain C.B. 'Sully' Sullenberger. It is well known that Captain Sullenberger demonstrated calmness in the face of threat. He successfully landed a passenger-full commercial aircraft in the middle of New York City's Hudson River. His plane had lost power due to the bird strikes, and this resulted in the subsequent failure of two engines. But the pilot was able to land safely in the river due to his belief in himself. Thus, he was able to demonstrate courage and boldness under adverse circumstances because it was the muscle that had been developed with intense training over the years.

Boldness as a Habit

This book revolves around the central theme of boldness as a habit that can be cultivated, rather than being a one-off single act. Courage is required in our daily professional and personal life. Be it speaking up at a meeting, acknowledging our mistake, opposing unreasonable demands from colleagues and friends, or accepting the consequences of a decision made by us. In each of these instances, we require some degree of courage. These provide the building blocks for courageous leadership. Professor Gulati refers to these instances as 'micro-bold acts'. He explains that acts help to develop one's resilience, and it also projects one's identity as a value-based leader. In the study of behavioural sciences, there are many habit-forming theories that support the idea that small actions and changes add up to bigger changes over time.

He cites authors like Charles Duhigg in his The Power of Habit (Random House, 2012) and Fogg in his book Tiny Habits (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019). He uses these examples to illustrate how small, repetitive actions add up to big changes in the end. He writes that courageous individuals needn't take large risks to demonstrate their courage. They may consciously be taking smaller, meaningful steps towards demonstrating courageous behaviour. These actions give individuals confidence to perform better in unfamiliar situations. Professor Gulati defines boldness in terms of 'daily practice'. Professor Gulati believes that a heroic act of leadership is not a prerequisite for defining boldness. He instead views boldness through the lens of everyday acts that build trust, credibility, and moral authority among individuals. In this book, Professor Gulati includes discussion of the social-relational (sociocultural) and structural dimensions of boldness.

Professor Gulati elucidates fear as not just an individual problem but rather as a structural issue. The structural issues that an organisation includes are hierarchy, performance evaluation systems, and cultural norms. This also includes behaviours exhibited by leaders that create environments where people perceive risk differently. As an example, some organisations might

have a culture that punishes employees for taking chances and discourages differing opinions. It creates restrictions for developing boldness and innovation. This also increases risk aversion. The author favours the need for creating systems in organisations that promote boldness. He mentions several specific structural elements, including psychological safety nets, open communication channels, ethical leaderships, and clearly defined decision-making processes. Individuals tend to act boldly when they believe that their actions will have positive effects.

One of the author's important discourses is that boldness without values leads to irresponsibility. He mentions that true courage exists only when it is associated with some type of moral principle rather than assertive behaviour. Values provide individuals with a moral compass during periods of uncertainty. The author says that leaders with a strong value system demonstrate true and consistent courage during times of uncertainty. The inference of this concept is that internally based moral value enables courage. A desire for external validation is not needed for the same.

Interdisciplinary Approach Towards Values and Courage

This book includes a large body of research related to leadership and uncertainty. The author includes lessons from Daniel Kahneman's behavioural economics in Thinking, Fast and Slow (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011), Amy Edmondson's psychological safety in The Fearless Organization (Wiley, 2018), and Angela Duckworth's grit and resilience in Grit (Scribner, 2016). This book combines this literature into a simple, straightforward model of boldness that can be implemented in everyday life. With the inclusion of scientific knowledge and practical advice, this book is useful to both researchers and practitioners alike. Professor Gulati has provided a number of tools for being bold and courageous. These can be used immediately by managers. These tools include ways to redefine fear, techniques to deal with uncertainty, ways to develop and practise small and incremental acts of courage, and strategies to create environments that foster boldness. All of these tools are developed using Professor Gulati's substantial research. These are easy for non-experts to use. The result is that this book is equally accessible to managers, educators, and policymakers. The focus on everyday decisions enables readers to think of courage as something that can be. Overall, Professor Gulati is asserting that courage can be developed through practice and through structurally based support systems.

Professor Gulati has applied a conversational approach in this book. He has done so by providing a number of anecdotal stories of people with diverse backgrounds. Readers who prefer academic writing will find these anecdotal examples useful. These examples show how everyday people handle fear in the real world.

Professor Gulati suggests that being bold and courageous can be learnt by individuals. But there might be situations where the capacity to act boldly and courageously can be limited by psychological or economic constraints. Organisations and sociopolitical systems can create

impediments that individuals alone might not be able to overcome.

Applications and Final Reflections

Professor Gulati's examples primarily come from Western cultures. These might not be able to fully capture how cultural differences might affect the ability to be bold and courageous. Power imbalances and cultural differences may also limit the probability of acting bold. In some corporate cultures, junior employees, women, minority groups and marginalised populations in the geographic locations might not be able to act boldly. Future research may be helpful in developing a conceptual model that examines the relationships between fear triggers and behaviours across multiple cultures.

This book adds considerably to the body of literature in the areas of strategic management and leadership. The author's suggestions resonate with Edgar Schein's culture theory in Organisational Culture and Leadership (Jossey-Bass, 2010). It is also in sync with Edmondson's work on psychological safety in The Fearless Organization (Wiley, 2018). Professor Gulati defines values as enablers of courage. He applies the concepts from behavioural economics. This contributes to the current research on authentic, ethical, and purpose-driven leadership. Professor Gulati defines boldness as a habit that can be developed. Therefore, he establishes a link between leadership studies and behaviour change models. Some of these models are presented by authors such as Duhigg in The Power of Habit (Random House, 2012), Fogg in Tiny Habits (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019), and Clear's Atomic Habits (Avery, 2018).

For academic institutions, this book provides many practical tools. The academic scholars can develop their own curricula for teaching about leadership. This could include reflective practices based on values and exercises which reinforce behaviour-based micro-courage. They can also implement teaching through simulations through which students can experience working in uncertain environments.

In implementing the learnings in the context of organisational settings, leaders can train their employees. This could be conducting a management development programme based on this book, where the participants can learn what it means to be bold. Trainers can do so through modelling vulnerability and supporting an environment that allows for free-flowing communication. Based on this book, organisations can also establish systems that encourage employees to be bold. They can also identify and honour those employees who demonstrate courage and prevent hierarchical barriers.

Using Professor Gulati's analysis, individuals will find a practical approach to building resiliency. They can use the learning from this book to overcome fear and use it as an opportunity rather than a barrier. They can take small calculated risks daily and make organisational decisions based

upon core values. The concepts presented in this book are particularly important during these periods of rapid technological change and disruption. Both individual and collective courage are required to address the complexities that we face today. This book is a timely and relevant study of courage in an age of uncertainty. The author connects boldness to psychology, neuroscience, and management research.

By sharing tools that encourage boldness and courage, this book is a valuable addition to the literature of leadership. It can also be helpful in decision-making and personal growth. This book provides a guide for scholars, managers, and policymakers by teaching them to handle uncertainty with integrity and purpose. Ultimately, the book is a veritable cornucopia of subjects of psychology, neuroscience, and management theory. It provides a guide for the readers for developing everyday courage in a world where uncertainty is the main challenge.

About Author:

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Dr. Gurpreet Singh Bhatia is Professor of Economics at IILM Lodhi Road with over a decade of teaching experience. He holds a Ph.D. in Economics from the prestigious National University of Singapore (NUS), and M Phil., from IIT Bombay. He has worked with think tanks like ICRIER, RIS, and the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, Singapore. His teaching and research area are in the field of microeconomics , macroeconomics, international economics, globalization and emerging markets, with a keen interest in AI blockchain and financial technologies. At IILM, he integrates academic rigor with real-world applications, preparing students to think critically and strategically about the evolving global economy in the era of industry 4.0

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