

The Courage to Begin

I ran across a little coffee table book the other day called *Rising to the Occasion, a Practical Compilation for the Occasionally Perplexed*. It contained dozens of short, witty essays on how-to topics such as changing a flat tire, starting a camp fire or unclogging a sink. All the practical little things you hope someone in your world knows how to do, and more importantly, will rise to the occasion to tackle when they most need doing. Left unsaid in the book is the reality that possessing the knowledge of how to do a thing means nothing without the courage to step up and do it. What if you screw up? What if people laugh at you? What if you harm your reputation? Well, as Robert Frost said, "The best way out is always through." And George Patton, "The courageous man is the man who forces himself, in spite of his fears, to carry on."

Few of us are called upon to display the kind of courage Patton is talking about (for those of you who do, thanks for your service!) But whatever the demons and dragons are we face in life, the key moment—the key decision point—usually comes right at the start: The moment when you stand up to deliver that toast that someone really needs to make, or the moment you roll up your sleeves and tackle that difficult customer request to design a better mousetrap. We've all heard the wisdom that the fear of what *might* happen is usually overblown compared to the reality of what *likely will* happen. So what's the trick? How do we ever begin tackling something that we've never done before?

Well as Jaime Escalante famously observed, what you need first and foremost is *ganas*, or desire; the desire to achieve all the greatness that is in you. We've all heard the commencement address at the end of the school year: dream big, take a risk, leave the world better than you found it, build relationships, and be a responsible member of society. Great stuff. But if you really want to do it, if you really want to be more in life than just a name on a business card, then you have to have courage. All the knowledge and luck in the world isn't enough.

The centerfold in this issue of *QwikConnect* is relevant to this topic. It features postage stamps celebrating the larger-than-life achievements of some noteworthy inventors. In case you missed the joke, the stamps aren't real. But the accomplishments certainly are. And my guess is that the most common attribute shared by everyone on the page—whether some government gave them a commemorative stamp or not—is courage. The courage to rise to the occasion. The courage to begin.

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