

COURAGE BUILDING MOMENTS

DAILY REFLECTION
WORKSHEET TO PROMOTE
TEAM COURAGE

COURAGE BUILDING MOMENTS (CBMs)

What are Courage Building Moments (CBMs)?

CBMs are the unique moments when your teammates take a risk **in the interest of improving or supporting the team or organization** (i.e. when they speak up, take initiative, or acknowledge a mistake). We call them Courage Building Moments because your responses to these moments determine the level of courage on your team.

There is **no neutral response**. Each time you respond to a CBM you either build up or destroy the courage your team members need to innovate and adapt. That's what makes these moments so important; they signify a moment of change, a moment that disproportionately shapes the agility, courage and strength of your team going forward.

How do I recognize a CBM?

There are things we simply don't want to know. Our comfortable stories about our brilliant strategy, flawless perspective, or even how capable we need our teammates to be, are easier to hold on to than having to stay open to new ideas, approaches or information, so we have a tendency to poke holes in what we hear when it's challenging¹.

Add to that, CBMs tend to happen the most frequently in high-stress situations when our time and mental energy is pulled in a million different directions. This makes recognizing these moments for what they are extra difficult and probably not what is top of mind for you right then.

¹ Tavis, Carol and Aronson, Elliot (2008). Mistakes Were Made (But Not by Me): Why We Justify Foolish Beliefs, Bad Decisions, and Hurtful Acts

So the real trick to recognizing CBMs is to build awareness of when something your colleagues say or do makes you feel annoyed, frustrated, or uncomfortable. Instead of dismissing or poking holes in what they did/said, ask yourself,

“Did it take courage for them to speak up/take on that difficult thing/acknowledge that mistake?²” and “Are they trying to help our team or organization be better?”

If the answer is yes, you need to respond well, or risk decreasing courage on your team.

Some real examples of CBMs

Speak up

“We work side by side with the community physicians. I asked this physician (who is known to be a bully with nursing staff) a question about how to manage a specific kid. He came back at me with a plan to give some IV antibiotics to a sick kid, which we don’t do anymore, so I kept questioning him. He got very frustrated and said if this kid had a poor outcome, it was on me, and I was making bad medical decisions.”

Take initiative

“I like clarity. I feel best when I have clear instructions on what I should do. But this is not how my boss operates. He just explains what he thinks is important, and what I shouldn’t worry about, and then tells me to figure it out. I always feel a bit uncomfortable that I hold full responsibility for my decisions but I am trying my best.”

Acknowledge a mistake or shortcoming

“I didn’t want to admit not knowing something, and had become this infallible work being where to err was a big problem in my mind. And yet, the junior people on my team were so willing to say they didn’t understand. It encouraged me to ask for help when I didn’t understand something. When I finally did, they came up to me afterwards and thanked me.”

² As leaders, we take for granted that our voice is welcomed, and forgot that our staff often feel unable to speak up because of all the unspoken rules telling them not to criticize something you were involved in, not to speak if your boss is in the room, to only share an idea of it’s 100% solid, to not say anything negative about a project in a group setting, etc. (source: Edmondson, Amy C. (2018). The Fearless Organization: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation, and Growth). Therefore, deciding to speak up, take initiative and/or acknowledge shortcomings - despite these unspoken rules - is a truly courageous act.

How do I respond to a CBM to create courage?

Your response to CBMs should always include the following three elements: *Gratitude*, *Reassurance* and *Process*.

Gratitude for the courage demonstrated

Example:

- *“Thank you for speaking up/taking on something hard/acknowledging your mistake. Actions like this are vital to our team.”*

Reassurance to minimize their worries about acting courageously

Examples:

- *“I need to hear information like this.”*
- *“I trust you.”*
- *“I’ve got your back.”*
- *“Don’t lose sleep over this.”*
- *“I have even more trust in you now that I see you are aware of how you can improve.”*

Process or indication of how you will move forward

Examples:

- *“This is what I plan to do (or not do) with your information/idea/concern and why.”*
- *“This is what success looks like. This is what failure looks like. This is what is most important to focus on. I understand it won’t be perfect.”*
- *“What do we need to learn from this? This is how I think I can help.”*

Avoid responding with coaching, feedback and/or critique; and failing to respond at all. This doesn’t mean you have to say, “Yes. That’s great!” to every idea, action, or acknowledged shortcoming. Rather, you have to:

- Be explicit as to why you give their concern or idea the go-ahead or not, and be clear on what would need to be true for you to want to pursue the idea or address their concern.
- Ensure your teammate(s) have a clear picture of what is most important to focus on, as well as what success and failure look like, so they can choose what to prioritize and how much energy and time (if any) to spend on the difficult task.
- Suggest a path to learning and growth once mistakes are acknowledged.

Moments to be extra diligent about your responses

There are a few situations that lend themselves to high numbers of CBMs but at the same time leave us less likely to respond well. These are:

A new team member's first few weeks on the job

As they become increasingly aware of everything they don't know, and having not yet had the time to build trusting relationships with colleagues, almost everything they say and do can feel like an act of courage to a new team member. We often respond poorly only because it's hard to see the subtle ways new employees speak up and ask for help as CBMs. So, be sure to be generous with your Gratitude, Reassurance, and Process response to whatever new employees put forward in these vital weeks.

When something is off

If your Spidey Sense is tingling – perhaps a project isn't going well, a relationship is strained, or the team otherwise isn't at their best – I promise you, you are not the only one feeling it. As a courage builder, your job is to acknowledge it, and be ready for the onslaught of CBMs that follow as people share their perspectives and feelings about the situation. We often respond poorly in these moments when we fear we might be blamed for whatever is off. Even just the possibility of blame causes most of us to respond defensively instead of staying open to the validity of the perspectives and experiences of others.

Times of high-stress (e.g. high stakes, looming failures, crunch times)

When we feel overwhelmed and out of our depth we often shift into problem-solving or fire-fighting mode to address the situation at hand. In this environment, taking on new hard tasks is expected, mistakes are likely (and harder to admit), and asking for help feels harder as it adds more work to someone else's plate who is likely also stressed. The trouble is, when we're in analytic problem solving mode, we are not in empathetic courage creation mode, and "our ability to appreciate the human cost of our action is repressed"³. We're more likely to respond poorly to the high stakes CBMs in these situations because we fail to perceive how our courage destroying actions are impacting those around us.

³ <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2012/10/121030161416.htm>

COURAGE BUILDING MOMENTS

DAILY REFLECTION WORKSHEET

Responding well to CBMs should be a regular activity that becomes a habit whenever a CBM happens. To help build that habit, for two weeks take a couple minutes at the end of every day and use this worksheet to recognize where and when CBMs happened and determine your response.

RECOGNIZE

What made me feel annoyed, frustrated, or uncomfortable today?

In what ways did team members try to push me, our team, or our organization to be better today?

When did team members take the risk of speaking up, taking on a difficult thing, or acknowledging a shortcoming today?

RESPOND

How did I respond to the moments identified above?

In what ways did my response likely create confidence or courage in my teammate?

In what ways did my response likely diminish confidence or courage in my teammate?

Knowing courage-building responses include *Gratitude*, *Reassurance* and *Process*, what would an ideal response be?

What will I say or do tomorrow to ensure I offer my teammate Gratitude, Reassurance and Process?