

Fertilizing Our Future

NURTURE THE SOIL. SOW SEEDS OF TOMORROW.

Bravery in Our Communications



Author Michelle Gladieux has spent her career redefining how we communicate. We're obviously impacted by the baggage of how we've been treated, how we were raised, how we've been hurt. The question to examine is how we can make our lives' interactions more successful and more joyous from those lessons. If we find a way to bring our full body, full mind and full heart — this is what communication is. We must have the courage to take risks, to be brave where the ideas matter to us.

Cover photo by Ajay Pandurang Bhagat / This photo courtesy Michelle Gladieux

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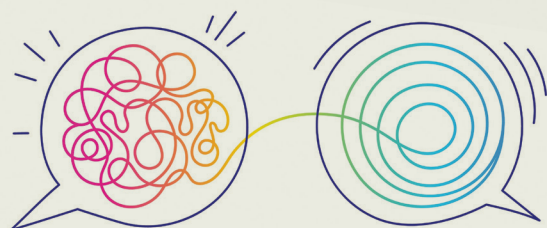
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Weaving Bravery Into Our Communications



*And then the day came when the risk to remain tight
in a bud was more painful than the risk to bloom.*

— ANAÏS NIN

Communication and bravery may be two things rarely considered to be woven together. But if communication is the warp, then bravery is the weft in creating the tapestry of a life. Just as in creating fabric, the vertical warp — communication — remains stationary in tension on a loom, while the weaver draws the horizontal weft — bravery — through.

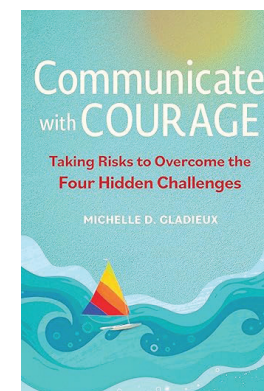
In her book, “Communicate with Courage: Taking Risks to Overcome the Four Hidden Challenges,” author Michelle Gladieux examines what it means to infuse our communications with courage or bravery. “Communication depends on the assumptions we make,” she explains. “We assume that what we say is what the other person hears. And that assumption is where the breakdown begins.”

Before examining the four hidden challenges in communication, Gladieux takes a broader view. “Our communications,” she says, “depend on the baggage of how we’ve been treated, how we were raised, how we’ve been hurt. The question to examine then is how we can make our lives’ interactions more successful and more joyous. If we find a way to bring our full body, full mind and full heart — this is what communication is.”

To be better communicators, we must have the courage to take risks. “We must risk being brave where the ideas matter to us,” she adds. “To embrace such bravery, we have to avoid hiding from risk, defending our position so we are right, rationalizing the negative and being just good enough — what I call the four hidden challenges. If we can be bold in these approaches, that’s what defines bravery in communication.”

Of course, communication with others is wrapped up in ego. “If we feel underappreciated or unseen,” Gladieux explains, “then we feel safe if we play small. We have to find the bravery within, even if things don’t go as we had hoped. We may need to knock some chips off our shoulders.

“That’s how we bridge the divide between us. And that is the whole purpose.”



MISSION FORWARD

Courage starts with showing up and letting ourselves be seen.

— BRENÉ BROWN

Many of us within Centers for Spiritual Living do work around finding our life's purpose, which Gladieux calls our mission. Her approach, as is true for so many of us, is to begin by figuring out a mission, a purpose you can align yourself with. "Doing so helps you prioritize your precious time on Earth," she says. As an example, she defines her own purpose this way: "I'm here to advocate that you start taking more smart risks as a communicator."

After spending decades coaching and training in the communication field, she learned that "summoning courage to review and revamp our messaging is a wonderful use of time."

Her work is meant to assist people in their work lives, as well as in interactions with family and friends. Her book is meant to assist in your work life as much as it is built to assist in your interactions with family and friends.

The book addresses what she calls **the four hidden challenges** in our communications:

1. Hiding from risk
2. Defining to be right
3. Rationalizing the negative
4. Settling for "good enough"

As she examines each of these, she includes what she calls "pro moves" to help readers develop their skill sets and exercises to practice those skills.

As you look at the four hidden challenges, you likely will see yourself in one or two or maybe in all four. "This is no cause for alarm," Gladieux explains. "In fact, you're in good company."

"If you'd like to overcome the obstacles, summon some courage to engage in the exercises. Think of them as investments in yourself, in relationships you have now and in relationships you've yet to form."

She acknowledges that change — whether in communicating or anything else — can be scary. "But you likely have an inner knowing about when it's needed," she says. "That inner knowing may have nudged you to pick up this magazine or my book and hopefully is calling you to step outside your usual ways of interacting."

"You may surprise yourself with guts you didn't know you had once you start down this path."

KNOW IF THE REWARD IS WORTH THE RISK

It takes courage to grow up and become who you really are.

— ee cummings

Gladieux suggests readers think of her book as a kind of "bravery manual," one that helps the reader turn risks into rewards. Her goal is to help each reader "reach their potential as a communicator."

She suggests we each "keep taking risks, by all means." But know which risk is worth taking. "Stand and deliver a toast at the next wedding you attend if you feel moved to do so," she writes. "But don't take the risk of drowning your nerves by getting good and drunk before you give the toast. Some risks in communication are just not worth taking."

Her suggestions to manage risk include:

- Don't risk your sanity by engaging with manipulative or unethical people.
- Don't risk setting unachievably high standards.
- Don't let others define you. Doing so leaves you holding the short end of the stick in your interactions.
- Don't avoid constructive or negative feedback. Doing so limits your growth as a communicator and as a human.
- Don't assume people know how you feel about them.

"Exercise restraint when a risk's cons outweigh its potential pros," she writes. "Hold your horses. Don't be so eager to show off your courage to take risks that you fail to size up your chances of success or to calculate the possible cost of your communication goals."

BE BRAVE ENOUGH TO REVISE AND BEGIN AGAIN

It's never too late in fiction or life to revise.

— NANCY THAYER

Many people position themselves as experts in various types of communication: interpersonal communication, corporate communication, public speaking, therapeutic communication. But at the end of the day, the question for each of us, whether we consider ourselves to be experts or not, is whether we are satisfied with how we communicated with the people who share our world.

To help us assess where we are, Gladieux suggests some questions for each of us to reflect on:

- Were you brave, willing to express yourself—or brave in a different and equally valuable way: willing to listen attentively?
- Were you in a hurry, or did you slow down long enough to convey that you care?
- Did you extricate yourself from an unproductive conversation to better use your time?

“As long as you’re living,” she says, “you get another chance tomorrow.” Maybe you took a risk in your communications and it didn’t go as you intended. You can apologize. You can start fresh because you now know more than you did when you entered that interaction. If need be, you can apologize. Through it all, you can learn lessons that support the bravery needed for effective communications.

“Brave communication doesn’t follow a step-by-step recipe,” Gladieux writes, “so don’t let anyone tell you it does. There’s no one right way to do it. You never graduate, but as you take smart risks, your communication becomes more powerful.

“There’s a world of wonder just beneath the surface of sending and receiving messages when you have a clearer view of what’s been tripping you up. It’s time to see what you might be missing.”

As she knowingly says, “Great communication is a full-body, full-mind and full-heart effort.” Be brave in the endeavor. ☘

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF HELPING PEOPLE OVERCOME FEAR

Michelle Gladieux is an executive coach, instructional designer, teacher and keynote speaker. She is deeply committed to helping people overcome their fears about communication so they can spark their own professional and personal growth. She earned her M.S. degree at Purdue University and has designed and presented more than 1,000 original seminars.

She coaches clients to become more successful leaders and communicators in corporate, nonprofit, academic, government and military settings. When it’s downtime, you’ll find her at one of her favorite places on Earth: a lake in Indiana, a beach on the Gulf Coast or a live music show.

Michelle’s nickname since sixth grade was “Glad,” and she strives daily to live up to it with a grateful heart. Learn more about her and her work (topics below) at GladieuxConsulting.com.



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