

## The King's Speech: Thoughts on the Importance of Courage

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Several years ago I published an article in *Reaching Out* entitled "Dealing With Teasing." In it, I closed with a quotation that New York's former Mayor Rudy Giuliani made shortly after the 9-11 bombing of the Twin Towers. Giuliani said, "Courage is about the management of fear, not the absence of fear." I recently saw the movie "The King's Speech" and was deeply moved by the magnificent way that the King's courage was portrayed. Hence, the current article. My purpose is neither to critique the movie, nor to comment on its historical accuracy. My purpose is to highlight issues related to COURAGE.

Some of the most courageous people I know are people who have faced and successfully dealt with their own stuttering. In some cases they were fellow campers and councilors at a summer camp I attended in New Hampshire. Some were fellow students in school. And professionally, they have been clients and friends with whom I have worked during the past 45 years. In some cases I have watched them learn to deal with being teased. In some cases I have watched them develop effective techniques and strategies for dealing with bullies. I have watched brave people do courageous things. In other cases I watched them learn to talk easily and communicate effectively in stressful speaking situations: e.g., talking on the phone, talking in class, making speeches, talking to people in authority, and conducting meetings, etc.

In addition to observing changes and improvements in speaking, I have observed changes and improvements in such things as poise, and self-confidence. But these changes did not always come easily. Usually, they were the end result of a journey that involved a certain degree of risk taking. We often need to give up the relative safety and security of the past in order to seek the desired goals of the future, and this is where we need to take realistic risks. As I said above: "Brave People doing Courageous things."

Bertie, the future king, had to take many risks: going to meet and ultimately work with Lionel Logue was just the beginning. At the beginning of their relationship, not all was rosy. At times he was blatantly antagonistic. There are often times when clients and clinicians mutually test each other, and times when clinicians must challenge their clients to take reasonable risks. Bertie did not trust Mr. Logue and only met with him secretly. He was often reluctant, negative and oppositional. There were instances where Bertie tested the limits of their relationship and sabotaged the goals that Logue was setting.

This initial resistance is a far cry from what happened late in the film when Bertie (soon to be King George VI) insisted that Logue sit in a place of honor, with his family, at Westminster Abbey. And still later, when King George VI had to make speeches to his Royal Subjects, he relied heavily on Logue being at his side for moral support, and encouragement. No longer could a King appear regal merely by sitting majestically on a horse and looking royal. Now, the King had to sound royal, regal and majestic while speaking to a stadium audience via the microphone or giving a radio address to an unseen public.

A forum such as this Newsletter, where the readership is so diverse, is not really appropriate for giving personal tips and tidbits of advice to such a wide and varied readership. But I think it is a good forum to share with you some pearls of wisdom from others who have written brilliantly about the subject of courage.

Winston Churchill (who reportedly both lisped and stuttered) wrote that “Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.”

John Wayne said that “Courage is being scared to death and saddling up anyway.”

An unknown author is credited with this gem: “Courage is looking fear in the eye and saying, “Get the Hell out of my way. I’ve got things to do.”

Omar Bradley, commenting on the daring and gallantry of World War II soldiers in combat wrote, “Bravery is the capacity to perform properly, even when scared half to death.”

As I said earlier, people who stutter need to take realistic risks to achieve long term success. They need to leave the relative safety and security of the present order to achieve future successes and accomplishments. And to do this, it helps to have the encouragement of a supportive clinician, supportive family and supportive friends.

As a clinician, I have not tried to tell my clients what they wanted to *hear*, but rather, to told them what they needed to *know* about the therapy process. And yes, the road will at times be bumpy, the hills will at times be steep, and the tasks may at first seem unattainable. An attitude and personal belief that I try to share with my clients is this: “You are on a journey that must be taken if you are to be successful, and I am here to go along with you. At times, I may need to hold your hand, and at times I may need to kick your butt. But we can make progress. You can do it, and I can help.”

If Bertie (George VI) had lived fifty years earlier, this story would never have taken place. Bertie would not have been called upon to make speeches where there were microphones and amplification systems to contend with. Back then, these would never have been an issue.

But that was then, and this is now. I hope there are lessons about courage and bravery that you can learn from Bertie.

Good Luck and Best Wishes.