

Leading the Way When the Way Is Unclear



A Resource for Mission-Driven Leaders

www.LisaBennettWrites.com

“

When everything seems to be going
against you,
remember that the airplane takes off
against the wind, not with it.

-- Henry Ford



The Opportunity

To have a mission is a privilege,
Rachael Carson, the writer who
inspired the modern
environmental movement, once
observed.

Yet, being a mission-driven leader in today's uncertain world can also feel daunting—as if you're struggling to stand upright against ever-shifting hurricane winds.



We are living, after all, in unprecedented times.

Every day seems to bring news of another crisis or seismic threat to what used to be called world order. The same appears true on the national front—and, of course, the ecological.

From the economy to politics, technology to the environment, order is out. Disorder is in.

Some call it a “polycrisis,” others a “permacrisis,” and many say it’s a “s*hitshow.”

Add in the complexity and interconnectedness of modern life, and it can all feel a bit much to wrap one's mind—let alone one's mission—around.



AND YET...

**We tend to grow
from difficulties
and wilt from too
much ease.**

Dr. Richard Tedeschi
coined a term for this in
1998. He called it
“adversarial growth.”

Dr. Mark D. Seery’s
research into “stress-
induced growth” has
also found overcoming
challenges can foster
well-being.



Stories of great leaders—and ordinary people—throughout history also attest to this dynamic.

Consider the **resourcefulness** cultivated during the Great Depression, the sacrifice and **unity** demonstrated during World War II, and the **adaptability** we more recently learned during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This is not to suggest that difficulties always lead to positive growth. There are many variables. There is also a point at which stress, ill-managed, becomes unproductive.



As the poet Horace put it 2,000 years ago: *Adversity has the effect of eliciting talents which, in prosperous circumstances, would have lain dormant.*

Yet it is generally true that, like a diamond formed under pressure and heat, humans are more likely to discover what they can do when put to the test.

A man in a dark suit, white shirt, and dark tie is smiling and looking off to the side. He is standing in an industrial or construction area with brick buildings and a paved ground in the background. The lighting is natural, suggesting an outdoor setting.

“
The vital question then is:
What can you do to help elicit
those talents in yourself and others
now to advance your mission?
”

A Key Variable: How we relate to uncertainty



Of course, we all spend time in each of the zones in the model above. But consider it an exercise in highlighting core dynamics. To this end, when the rate of change is low, you are likely either bored or -- these days -- living in a bit of a fantasy zone (or both.) The reason:

We are living in the first “Exponential Age.”

In his 2021 book, *The Exponential Age*, Azheem Azhar writes:

“It’s tempting to assume that people always feel technological social change is going too fast...But the argument of this book is that we are indeed living through a time of unusually fast social change...”





So, what is your
relationship to
uncertainty during
this time of
unprecedented
change?

If it is LOW, you are likely in the stress zone—or, more accurately, the high-stress zone, it's understandable. But it also can lead to many negative consequences.

But there's **good news:**

There are ways for you and your team to develop HIGH comfort with uncertainty that can help you advance your mission.

How? Through the widely admired but relatively little understood matter of **COURAGE.**

But first...

3 Common Challenges Mission-Driven Leaders Face



1. Disengagement is high, costly, and damning.

- Slightly more than **1 out of 3**, or 34 percent of, employees are disengaged (Gallup survey.)
- \$8.8 trillion cost worldwide. That's an average of **\$3,400 for every \$10,000** of salary paid. Gallup.
- “Damning” is clear more subjective. But if 1 out of 3 employees are disengaged, and \$3,400 is lost for every \$10,000 in salary paid, that is an indisputable drag on progress.





2. Stress is at epidemic levels (not the good kind.)

- Stress is “the epidemic of the 21st century.” (WHO)
- **1 out of 3** Americans are so stressed they are unproductive. (2022 APA study)
- Annual employer price tag: **\$300 billion.** (American Institute of Stress.)

Chronic and ill-managed stress **undermines physical and mental health and productivity.** It can also **interfere with attention, decision-making, adaptation, creative thinking, and communication.**

3. People are pessimistic. And that's an obstacle to action.

According to a 2023 Pew Research Center study:

- 63% of Americans are pessimistic about moral and ethical standards
- 59% are pessimistic about the state of education.
- And 44 % are pessimistic about racial equality.

WHY IT MATTERS: Research shows pessimism **can significantly affect the problem-solving skills required to succeed in achieving goals.**

When people are pessimistic, they tend to dismiss potential solutions before exploring them, be less creative, and have their decision-making paralyzed.



The Unseen Obstacle – and Opportunity



There's a word for what it requires to meet difficulties, small or great, few or many. The ancient Greeks considered it the most important virtue—the one on all others depend. Plato described it as the ability to persevere in the face of difficulty.

COURAGE

“The mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty.”

-Merriam-Webster

How Developing Courage Pays Off

Saves time and money wasted on indecision, avoidance or procrastination, and anxiety

Improves decision-making, innovative problem-solving, and adaptation

Supports positive mental health.



How to Get From Here to There

HERE



THERE

Disengagement

Stress

Lack of Clarity


Mission Clarity

Mission Alignment

Mission Driven



3 Things to Know

A close-up photograph of a brick wall. The bricks are reddish-brown with some darker spots. The word "COURAGE" is written in black, uppercase letters on a central brick. Below the word, three numbered points are written in white text on the bricks.

COURAGE

1. Courage can be developed.

2. There are more ways to be courageous than we think.

3. It is in the best interest of employers & employees to learn courage in the workplace.

A person is captured mid-jump, leaping over a gap between two large, dark rock formations. The person is wearing dark clothing and boots. The background is a bright, hazy sky, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall scene conveys a sense of challenge and triumph.

The Bottom Line

To achieve mission-driven goals amid today's unprecedented uncertainty and change, **it is vital that we normalize courage in the workplace by making it a cornerstone of leadership and other professional development workshops.**

After all, activating courage benefits employers and employees, according to a 2022 study in *The European Journal of Investigation in Health, Psychology, and Education*.

And it just might provide the fog lights we need to see through the current clouds of uncertainty.

**How Can You Develop
Courageous Leadership and a
Courageous Culture?**

Solve Your Toughest Problems Faster

**The
Courageous
Leaders,
Courageous
Culture
Program**



The Courageous Leaders, Courageous Culture Program

Mission- and purpose-driven leaders love big challenges. But chasing important goals in today's uncertain climate (and the high anxiety and low engagement that result) can undermine the capacities of the most well-intentioned teams.

This program is designed to boost performance, productivity, and problem-solving by:

1. Identifying unspoken obstacles
2. Facilitating transformative conversations
3. Developing the perspective, emotional intelligence, and behaviors needed to succeed in uncertain times.



YOUR GUIDE:

AUTHOR, COACH, TRAINER,
FACILITATOR, SPEAKER,
AND AWARD-WINNING
JOURNALIST **LISA BENNETT**

Lisa has learned first-hand from Nobel Prize-winning scientists, Pulitzer Prize-winning authors, top civil rights leaders, Ivy League University presidents, leaders of major foundations, nonprofits heads, CEOs, everyday changemakers, and other highly respected leaders of our time.

She also has been a leader in national organizations advancing equality, education, and the environment.

A former Harvard University fellow and New York University faculty member, Lisa Bennett is the author of *Mission-Driven: Leading With Courage in an Uncertain World* (forthcoming) and co-author of *Ecoliterate* with emotional intelligence expert Daniel Goleman.

Clients have included the MacArthur Award-winning FrameWorks Institute, Human Rights Campaign, Southern Poverty Law Center, Chambers for Innovation & Clean Energy, and Protect Our Winters.

“Lisa is a great collaborator.”
DANIEL GOLEMAN, *New York Times* best-selling author of *Emotional Intelligence*.

“Lisa is a gifted speaker and writer.”
ELIZABETH BIRCH, former Executive Director of the Human Rights Campaign

Ecoliterate is a “powerful and persuasive book”
SIR KEN ROBINSON, creativity expert and #1-watched speaker on TED

To learn how the **Courageous Leaders, Courageous Culture Program** can help you, let's connect.

[Book a chat now.](#)

Or drop me a line.



www.LisaBennettWrites.com



Lisa@LisaBennettWrites.com

Photo Credits

Thanks to Andrea Brian McGowan, Christina Woc, Elisa Ventura, Getty Images, Hunters Race, Jon Tyson, Marcus Woodbridge, Maxime Gsuo, Michael Shofield, Milan Fakuian, Sammie Chafin, Sander Sammy, Taylor Grote, Ted Balmer, Vladimir Fedotov, and Yan Alegre via Unsplash.