

## Talented CLOs Hit the Bull's Eye (Jan 09)

**Sandra Ford Walston**

Hitting the bull's-eye means being on target, but have you ever wondered where the term comes from? In the 17th century, English longbow yeomen often held archery practice immediately after church services, the only time when many of the archers could gather. A common target was the white skull of a bull, and the greatest skill could be illustrated by getting a "bull's eye."

Hitting the target is one thing, but consistently putting arrows in the bull's-eye requires enormous practice. A high level of competence requires disciplined training to develop a certain set of skills.

Many people intuitively recognize their target but distrust their vision and aim in the wrong direction. Aristotle said, "Courage is the first of human virtues because it makes all the other virtues possible." Failure to aim at the right target represents a failure of courage.

By acting with courage, chief learning officers take aim at the true target of their work and begin to hit the bull's-eye with ease, with both personal and organizational implications.

### **Are You Off Target?**

A recent Gallup poll found that job satisfaction has steadily declined from nearly 60 percent in 1995, to just 50 percent in 2004. Developing courage and the skills that manifest courage at work will help anyone struggling with a lack of self-contentment.

Dorie McCubbrey knows about getting off target. At the encouragement of guidance counselors and family, she excelled academically and earned a doctorate in bioengineering. Despite a lack of passion for her work, she was reluctant to change career paths, and in this state of unhappiness, she developed a severe eating disorder.

"My passion finally emerged while I was being treated for my eating disorder," she said. "It became clear that my mission was to help others overcome their eating disorders."

Turning down a six-figure salary, McCubbrey returned to college to earn her counseling degree. It took years for McCubbrey to find the courage to act with authenticity and originality. Sadly, there's no magic formula for originality. Anyone can shoot arrows, but few are enthused to get on target. This is where the CLO can step in and help.

### **Getting Back to the Center**

Developing courage consciousness is a process. Exploring and understanding courage takes time and dedication, just like being an archer who consistently hits the bull's-eye.

Examine personal courage by asking a few simple questions:

- Would I stay in a job I hate or don't believe in?
- Am I inclined to secure my physical safety despite great inconvenience?
- Would I hide a mistake because I need my job?
- Am I prone to selling my soul and I know it?

Honestly answering these questions allows you to assess courage and its correlation to the number of missed shots.

The problem is that most people want concrete answers and a quick fix, not the ongoing process of self-reflection. They simply don't want to dwell on the answers to probing questions.

### **Deceptively Simple**

The simplest actions can have a tremendous impact. The skilled archer pauses his or her breathing before releasing the arrow. The talented CLO knows the value of the pause, and that it is a powerful tool known as reflection. It allows one to have goals, yet stay present to shift gears as needed. This is different from going with the flow or living in complacency.

The concepts presented here are deceptively simple. In the article "Simple Courage," Ren ♦ Da Costa wrote that people at all levels of work shun simplicity for complication.

He said: "Simplicity takes talent and dedication, and it requires a great deal of courage. It takes courage to advocate simplicity. Simplicity has nowhere to hide and neither do those who advocate it."

This forgotten virtue, courage, is worth a steady stream of bull's-eyes. How does the CLO start to discover and identify his or her courage at work? CLOs with courage develop new business models when the door to an old model closes or the existing model no longer works. When asked if they have courage, they respond with an enthusiastic "yes" rather than "maybe" or "at times."

Another example includes CLOs asking for the tough project that no one wants and staying focused daily on the results. The courageously astute CLO directs people to determine if they're on target or if they're even aiming at the target.

How can the CLO increase accuracy and help others in the organization nurture courage skills? Here are three strategies:

1. **Determine why you are living off target.** If you are not consistently hitting the bull's-eye, you're probably being thrown off center. Start to notice if you're focusing on negative external factors and unhealthy habits such as complaining and acceptance of mediocrity that can drain energy. A healthier perspective diminishes the missed shots in professional life. At this level of consciousness, it is valuable to remember the saying: "What is held in the mind tends to manifest."
2. **Enhance accuracy with reflection.** Courage centering begins with learning to stop and reflect. Reflection techniques promote focus, centeredness and awareness. Adopting a contemplative discipline begins the practice of targeting the bull's-eye in all aspects of life.
3. **Start to underscore bull's-eyes.** Begin to underscore hits. These are your defined behavioral competencies, the times when you feel energized about your work rather than dispirited. Observe and celebrate people in the day-to-day life, and recognize how bull's-eyes make a difference in society. This awareness provides an example, makes courage contagious and can transform the workplace.