How to build teams of micro-innovators, problem solvers, & customer advocates

Executive Strategy Guide

COURAGEOUS
CULTURES

Karin Hurt & David Dye

How to

Use This Strategy Guide

Welcome to the *Courageous Cultures Executive Strategy Guide*!

This resource is meant to accompany the book *Courageous Cultures: How to Build Teams of Micro-Innovators, Problem Solvers, and Customer Advocates.* If you've found your way to this strategy guide but don't have the book, you'll want to get it right away.

Get *Courageous Cultures* Now:

The first four chapters in this strategy guide are meant for you. They'll help you reflect on your leadership and prepare to build a courageous culture. The First Tracks activities starting in Chapter 5 are meant for you to do with your team. You can certainly use them as individual reflection prompts, but you'll get the best results when you work with your team, dive in, and work through the activities together.

We wish you all the best on your *Courageous Cultures* journey, and we'd love to know how you're doing. As you use the resources and methods in this strategy guide, take a moment to tell us what you're using and the results you've seen. Email us at **info@letsgrowleaders.com**.

Karin Hurt & David Dye

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Chapter 1
About Courageous Cultures

Self-Assessment

Are you leading a courageous culture? This short online quiz will give you an indication of where you're starting your Courageous Cultures journey.

https://harpercollins.outgrow.us/CourageousCulturesQuiz

Chapter 2

Your Company in an AI Universe and the Gig Economy

Gig Economy Analysis Questions:

- How has technology impacted your customer experience (consider both external and internal customers)?

- What's better now, and what's more challenging? How do you know?

- How will technology change your industry in the next three to five years? Five to ten years?

- How do the people in your organization provide you with a distinct competitive advantage?

- How often are your employees speaking up with creativity, empathy, and problem-solving?

- In the competition for talent, why would a prospective employee want to be a part of your culture?
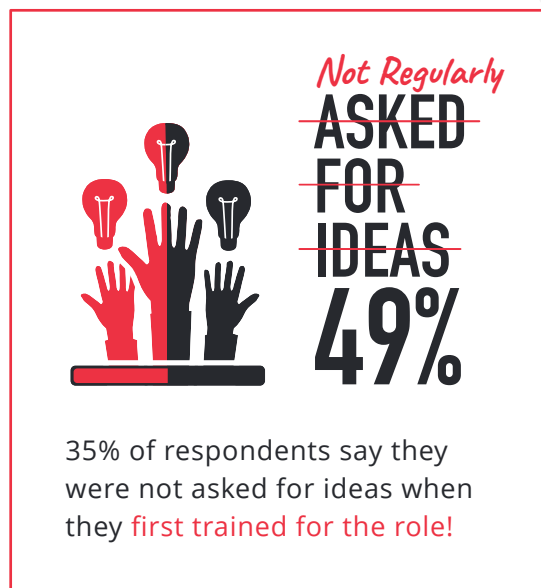
Chapters 3 & 4
Research

Our research collaboration with the University of Northern Colorado's Social Research Lab shows that employees have good ideas, they want to be heard and leadership wants to hear them.

However, all too often, employees and leaders feel that no one cares about cultivating a communicative culture of *solution-focused problem solvers.*

These barriers to a Courageous Culture are natural tendencies, but they aren't set in stone. It's possible to change the culture and make the shift from safe silence to consistent contribution.
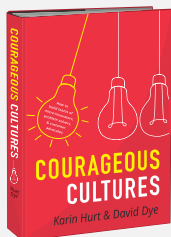
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35% of respondents say they were not asked for ideas when they first trained for the role!

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30%   50%
DON'T FEEL CONFIDENT
Sharing Ideas

Conclusions

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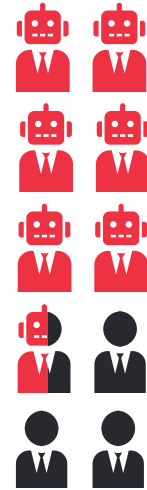
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2. No one asks

3. They lack confidence to share

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COURAGEOUS CULTURES
www.CourageousCulturesBook.com

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Courageous Cultures Questions to Consider

Why Build a Courageous Culture?

- Why do you want a Courageous Culture?

- What specific outcomes are you looking to achieve?

- How will you know you are successful?

- What scares you? Why?

- What hard choices must you be prepared to make?

- What support do you have (who's with you? Who's not . . . why?)

Avoiding Courage Crushers

- What processes do you have in place to prevent (and make it easy to report) bullying and harassment?

- What do you do when a high performer regularly abuses or harasses other people?

- Which of these courage crushers is the biggest source of vulnerability for your organization?

- What behaviors will you have a zero tolerance for in your organization?

- Do your managers have the fundamental management and communication skills they need to implement a Courageous Culture?

First Tracks: Courage Map

Objectives:

- To reflect on your **best experiences with courage** to build confidence and lay the groundwork for your Courageous Culture strategy

- To **encourage conversation** with your direct report team on what courage means and why it's important

- To **identify shared values and behaviors** to ground your Courageous Cultures vision

Time Required:
About an hour depending on team size and length of conversation

Process:

1. **To build your Courage Map, make a broad timeline of your career, thinking back to your early roles as well as more recent ones.** Now think about the most courageous acts you did in these roles and lessons learned along the way. If you're like most of our clients, you'll recall some great ones that you haven't thought about in quite some time. If you're struggling to come up with at least three examples, do what we did: ask people who know you well to describe their memory of your most courageous act at work.

2. **Once you've identified a minimum of three moments of courage, for each courageous act, ask yourself the following questions:**

   - What motivated me to be courageous in this circumstance?

   - What did I expect to happen?

   - What actually happened as a result?

   - How do I feel about this incident?

   - What values did it reveal as important to me?

   - As a leader today, where would it be helpful to show up more like this or with these values?

3. **Look for the themes.** What do you notice about yourself in these stories? What makes you proud? What is the essence of these stories that you hope to carry forward into your future stories? What lessons do you have to share with your team? How will you tell them?

4. **Invite your direct report team to complete the exercise and schedule some time to discuss as a team.** Have each person pick one story to share. What themes emerge? What do you notice about the underlying values of these choices? What are the key learnings from these stories you can leverage as you begin your work to build a more Courageous Culture?

First Tracks:
Own the U.G.L.Y.

By now you may know exactly where you want to focus your team's best thinking and innovation and you're ready to move on to Chapter 7 where you'll work on building and communicating your vision for a Courageous Culture. But if you aren't quite sure where to start, or you need help prioritizing your focus, start with our Own the U.G.L.Y. exercise.

Objective:

To identify a strategic priority to focus your initial Courageous Cultures work.

Time Required:
About an hour depending on depth of discussion

Process:

"Own the U.G.L.Y." is a series of four provocative questions to brainstorm with your team: What are we Underestimating? What's got to Go? Where are we Losing? And, where are we missing the Yes.

You can do this exercise as a team, or break into sub-groups. Have each group take a letter and work on the related questions to then read out to the team.

U

WHAT ARE WE UNDERESTIMATING?

Competitive pressures? New technology? The opportunity that we "don't have time for"?

G

WHAT'S GOTTA GO?

What are we doing now that doesn't make sense anymore? What processes are more habit than value? What meetings are wasting our time? What's gotta go for us to be remarkable?

L

WHERE ARE WE LOSING?

Where are we still under-performing despite our best efforts? Why? Who's doing it better? How?

Y

WHERE ARE WE MISSING THE YES?

What must we say "Yes" to in the next 6-12 months? What new opportunities are yearning for our attention? Where must we invest more deeply?

This "Own the U.G.L.Y." exercise is a quick way to clarify your focus and pick a good starting point as you incubate your Courageous Culture. Once you've answered these questions, talk with your team about one area of your business where you need your employees' best thinking and new ideas. In the next chapter, we'll talk more about how to ensure everyone has a shared understanding of what matters most, your strategic goals, and how to participate in your culture.

First Tracks: Building a Courageous Cultures Vision

Now it's your turn to define what a Courageous Culture looks like for your organization and prioritize which behaviors you will work on first. Gather your direct report team and complete this visioning exercise. After this process, you will have a clear vision of what it means to have an organization where everyone is a problem solver, micro-innovator or customer advocate and one specific behavior to implement.

Objectives:

Identify a specific vision for the Courageous Culture you want to build.

Time Required: About Two hours

You and your team will commit to at least one starting behavior that will help you practice and generate momentum.

Process:

1. **Identify the focus areas of a Courageous Culture you want to create: micro-innovation, problem-solving, or customer advocacy.**

   For example, you may be all about problem-solving and innovation but are not quite ready for the customer-advocacy piece. Or it could be the opposite. Perhaps your sole focus is to improve your customer experience, and you want to start with a deep focus on what it means to be a customer advocate. You might want to start more narrowly and focus your team on solving customer-impacting issues or how to get more creative at solving customer problems on the spot. Or, like George, you may want to start with a focus on problem-solving by speaking truth respectfully.

2. **Take the focus you identified in Step One and create a focus-question.**

    Here are a few examples:

    - Imagine it's two years from now and we have micro-innovation happening at every level of the organization. What behaviors are we seeing at the executive, manager and frontline level?

    - What would it really mean for us to have an organization where every employee was empowered and encouraged to be a true customer advocate? What behaviors would we see at the executive, manager and frontline level?

    - How do we get better at solving the most important problems impacting our business? What behaviors do we need to develop, encourage and reward at the executive, manager and frontline level?

    Notice that every one of these questions is focused on identifying behaviors. That's vital to make this vision something you can clearly describe, train to, reinforce, observe and measure. One way to ensure the conversation you are about to have is focused on behaviors is to imagine if you could hire a videographer to record what was happening on a day two years from now. What behaviors would she capture when your vision is a reality?

3. **Give every member of your direct report team three stacks of sticky notes, each stack a different color.** The colors represent one of three levels of the organization: executive, manager, and frontline. Share your focus question with the team and ask each person to silently brainstorm the related behaviors they would see at each level of the organization when that vision is achieved. Ask them to write one behavior per sticky note and make a pile of behaviors for each level. At the end of this step, each person will have three piles of sticky notes in front of them.
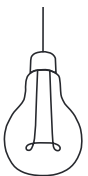
    NOTE: It might be tempting to do this as a group discussion, but doing the internal work first ensures every member of your team contributes their best thinking and allows the ideas to stand on their own merit.

Example behaviors might include:

Executive

- We constantly talk to customers to understand their perspective
- We celebrate innovation at every level
- We train our employees on how to solve problems and think critically

Manager

- We ensure every employee understands our strategic priorities and where we need their best thinking to improve the business
- We start every team meeting with a courageous question
- We share best practices with our peers

Frontline

- We speak up when we see a problem
- We constantly ask, "How can we do this better?"
- We find creative solutions to delight our customers

4. **Identify three separate areas (one area for each level) where team members will place their sticky notes.** Have team members randomly place their notes in the designated areas.

5. **After all the sticky notes have been placed in each area, ask the team to review what everyone wrote.** Once they've read through all the notes, have them rearrange the notes in clusters of similar behaviors or themes. Then ask them to identify the one clustered theme in each level that they believe would make the biggest difference in achieving the target vision.

6. **As a team, discuss the prioritized clusters.** What themes emerged? Are there consistent priorities across the organization, or do they differ by level? Conclude the discussion by working with the team to identify one (maximum of two) behaviors for each level that will serve as your starting point.

7. **As a team, commit to the behaviors you identified for your level.** How will you implement it?

    Schedule a time in thirty days when you will review your progress.
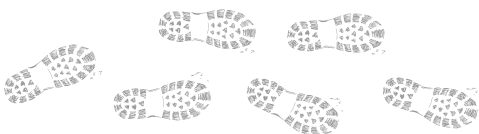
First Tracks: Courageous Questions

Objectives:

- To check in on the behaviors your team identified in Chapter 7

- To identify the most appropriate Cultivate Curiosity techniques to experiment with

- To select the best Courageous Questions to ask and identify your plan for asking them

Time Required:
About an hour

Process:

In the last chapter, you worked with your team to cultivate your vision and identified a few specific behaviors you each were going to practice consistently as your starting point to building a Courageous Culture. Before you jump into the next First Tracks exercise, be sure to check in to ask about how those behaviors are working and the impact they've seen.

Assemble your direct report team and answer the following questions together:

- Where do you most need your team's best ideas? What do you need to get most curious about now?

- Which Cultivate Curiosity techniques will you use to uncover your team's best ideas?

- What courageous questions (see the sidebar earlier in the chapter) do you most need to ask your team?

- When will you commit to use one of the Cultivate Curiosity techniques or ask the courageous questions you identified?

First Tracks: Find Five
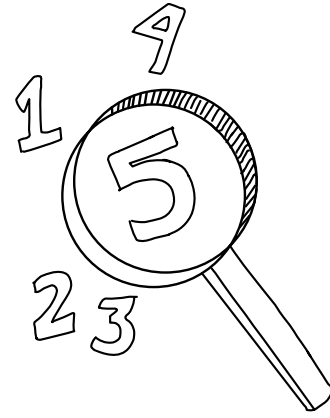
Objectives:

- To identify best practices, new ideas, or micro-innovations to recognize and celebrate

- To reinforce and celebrate the Courageous Cultures behaviors and why they are so important

Time Required:
Not much extra,
you can do this while
you're out and about.

Process:

Your First Tracks to Respond with Regard is to practice seeking out and celebrating contributions. Specifically, work with your team to find and celebrate five contributions. These can be success stories, best practices, and micro-innovations. If it happens that someone brings you an idea, even better – Respond with Regard. If you seek out ideas to celebrate, make sure to recognize at least one contribution that didn't succeed or hasn't been used yet. You want to reinforce the act of thinking and problem-solving, not just successful implementation.

First Tracks: Identify the Principle

Objectives:

- To determine best practices with the opportunity to scale—and to determine how to make them transferrable

- To practice identifying the principle within a best practice

Time Required:
About an hour

Review some of the best practices you discovered in your work in Chapter 9. As your team reviews what's working, help them to identify and extract the principle from the best practice.

Here are a few questions you can use:

- In what circumstances is this an ideal best practice?

- Are these circumstances different from team to team?

- Why does this practice achieve such good results?

- In our organization, what is defined and must be consistent from team to team? (eg: brand standards, regulations and legal requirements, and strategic objectives that you identified in the "know" step of the Clarity phase.)

- What's different from context to context (team to team, place to place, other)?

- What is the core behavior or activity that will work across teams and regions, and how might it look different in those different contexts?

First Tracks:
Your Communication Plan

Now it's time to take the principle you explored and Galvanize the Genius with a communication plan that ensures Clarity and results.

Time Required:
15–30 minutes to build communication plan

10–30 days to implement plan

Objective:

- To ensure that your chosen micro-innovation, solution, or best practice is transmitted accurately and implemented throughout your team

Process:

Working with your team, complete the following communication plan.

KNOW
What Matters Most
(eg: deliver premium service with these three behaviors . . .)

FLOW

Your 5 × 5 Communication Strategy

(eg: team meetings, email, posters, informal videos, company offsite)

SHOW

That It's Happening

(eg: MBWA, site visits, peer recognition program)

First Tracks: Inventory Your Infrastructure

Objectives:

- To have a candid conversation about your infrastructure and support systems

- To prioritize opportunities for greater alignment and support of the culture you're looking to build

Time Required:
About an hour

Process:

It may feel overwhelming to consider every part of your infrastructure at once. To get started, complete this quick audit of your infrastructure and systems. Each system gets two ratings. The first rating in Column A is a "Mis-alignment Index" (10 is Not Aligned at all – it's creating the opposite of a Courageous Culture. 1 is Very Aligned.) The second rating in Column B is your level of influence. How much ability do you have to control, influence, or change this system? (10 is 100% influence – I can change this today. 1 is 0% influence – eg: an external regulation or rule the entire company must work within.)

SYSTEM	A MIS-ALIGNMENT (1 LOW -10 HIGH)	B DEGREE OF INFLUENCE (1 LOW – 10 HIGH)	FINAL SCORE (MULTIPLY A X B FOR A FINAL SCORE)
Recruiting			
Interviewing & Hiring			
Onboarding			
Compensation			
Recognition, Rewards, Bonus Structure			
Employee Training			
Performance Management			
Manager & Leadership Training			
Promotion & Succession Planning			

Once you've rated each item in both categories, multiply the numbers together. Each item will end up with a final score between 1–100.

Items with a score of 70 or higher are candidates for immediate action. To keep it simple and build momentum, choose the highest rated item and work with your team to build an action plan to address it.

First Tracks:
Manager Development Plan

Objectives:

- To build an intentional approach to prepare your managers for leading in a Courageous Culture

Time Required:
60-90 minutes

Process:

1. Review your existing management training. Do your managers receive instruction and reinforcement in critical leadership and management skills before they are placed in roles with responsibility for people? If not, how will you address this gap?

2. How and when will you communicate with your managers your personal vision regarding the importance of a Courageous Culture and teams of micro-innovators, problem-solvers, and customer advocates?

3. Where and when will you invite managers to participate in your Courageous Cultures journey? (eg: Navigate their Narrative, participate in a Fear Forage, answer and ask courageous questions, solicit direct feedback and model positive response.)

4. How and when will you communicate Courageous Culture leadership and management expectations?

5. What is one activity you will give your managers to begin their practice? (Eg: At your next meeting, ask a courageous question related to your current top goal. Or, at your next meeting, tell your team a 2–3 minute story of a mistake you made, what you learned from it, and what you hope they're able to take away from your mistake.)

6. When and how will you follow-up to Galvanize the Genius and ensure that your managers are implementing Courageous Culture behaviors in their teams?

DIY 360

Formal 360 feedback assessments are a great way to get structured, anonymous feedback. Get targeted feedback from the full circle of people around you: your supervisor, your colleagues, and the people you lead.

360 feedback increases your self-awareness and gives you information about what's working and where you can improve your leadership.

1. Start with Confident Humility

Be ready to listen with an open mind.

2. Identify Areas of Interest

Focus on a few key areas where you really want feedback. Keep it simple and make it easy for both you, and the people you are planning to talk to.

3. Craft a Few Open-Ended Questions (here are few examples)

- What do you think are my biggest strengths?

- What could I do to be more effective in our meetings?

- How could I have a more strategic impact on our results?

- What about my communication style gets in the way?

- If you could identify one area for me to work on this year, what would that be?

4. Identify People to Ask for Feedback

- Include people in a variety of roles

- Don't stack the deck with all friendlies or known detractors – work to get a balanced perspective

- Approach them one on one, and explain why you're doing this

- Explain that you're really looking for candid feedback and that you'll be happy to circle back with themes and key actions

- Thank them

5. Identify themes and key actions

- Look for themes or differences in perspectives

- Circle back with stakeholders to share what you've learned and what you will be working on
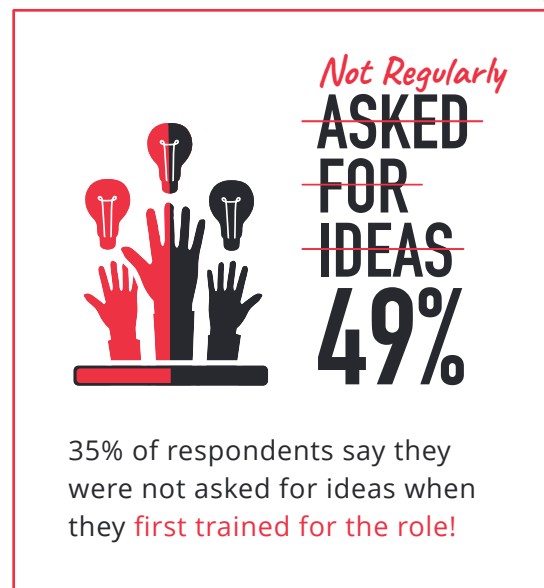
Shareables

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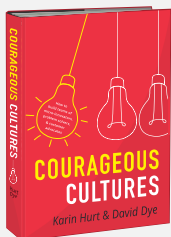
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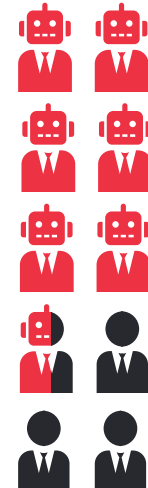*Sharing Ideas*

Conclusions

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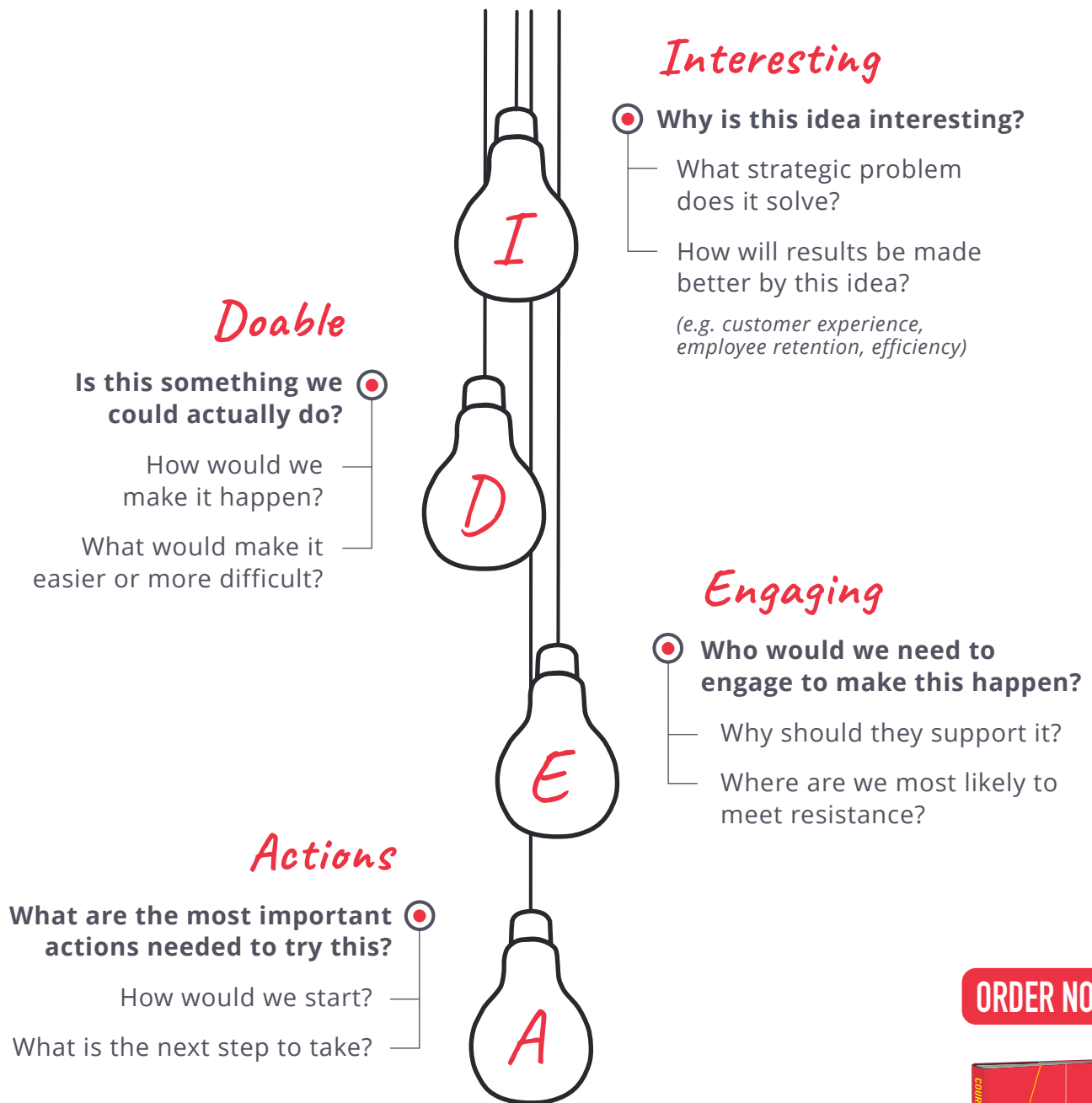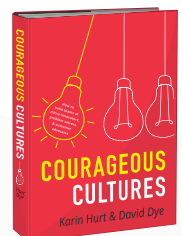PROBLEM SOLVING / CRITICAL THINKING TRAINING
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I.D.E.A. Model

A good I.D.E.A. has a better chance of *being used and making a difference.*
Help your team bring you BETTER ideas by sharing these criteria.

Interesting

● **Why is this idea interesting?**

What strategic problem does it solve?

How will results be made better by this idea?

(e.g. customer experience, employee retention, efficiency)

Doable

Is this something we could actually do? ●

How would we make it happen?

What would make it easier or more difficult?

Engaging

● **Who would we need to engage to make this happen?**

Why should they support it?

Where are we most likely to meet resistance?

Actions

What are the most important actions needed to try this? ●

How would we start?

What is the next step to take?

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Karin Hurt & David Dye

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COURAGEOUS CULTURES

How To

Respond to Ideas

Effective leaders receive ideas and respond in ways that show respect, build momentum, improve strategic thinking, and **generate more useful ideas.**

Open with gratitude
"Thank you for thinking about how we can do this better!"

If the idea is viable
Involve the employee in testing. Can you invite the team member to help test the idea?

If the idea is incomplete
Explain what is missing. What questions / obstacles do they need to address? Can you ask them to resubmit the idea with the additional information thought through?

If the idea is redundant
Show the existing solution. Where and how is the solution implemented? Who can the team member talk with to learn more?

If the idea is off target
Explain why this idea is a miss. What considerations diminish the value right now? What information would help the employee come up with better ideas next time?
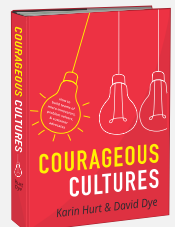
Close with invitation
"Please continue to problem solve and advocate for our customers!"

Create a cycle of innovation.
By responding with regard and inviting more ideas, the energy and flow of ideas doesn't stop after a first attempt.

COURAGEOUS CULTURES

7 Steps to a Courageous Culture

1 *Navigate the Narrative*

Leverage your courageous moments to inspire future confidence.

2 *Create Clarity*

Build a foundation of safety, direction, and confidence.

3 *Cultivate Curiosity*

Intentionally seek out ideas, engagement, and solutions.

4 *Respond with Regard*

Acknowledge, celebrate, and invite more contributions.
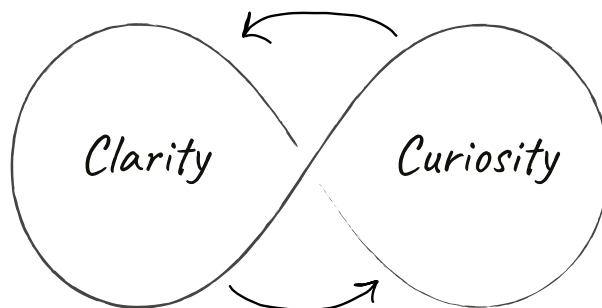
5 *Practice the Principle*

Find the universal ideas that can scale and localize best practices.

6 *Galvanize the Genius*

Build momentum, sustain success, and prevent a return to old behaviors.

7 *Build an Infrastructure for Courage*

Align system and processes to support your Courageous Culture.

Clarity   *Curiosity*

Karin Hurt and **David Dye** help leaders around the world build high-performance, high-engagement cultures through their **innovative programs and practical tools**. A former Verizon Wireless executive, Karin is CEO of Let's Grow Leaders and was recently named to Inc. Magazine's list of great leadership speakers. David is a former executive, elected official, and president of Let's Grow Leaders, their leadership training and consulting firm.

More ways to read (and share) Courageous Cultures

BULK DISCOUNTS
THROUGH BOOK PAL

LISTEN ON AUDIBLE
(READ BY KARIN AND DAVID)
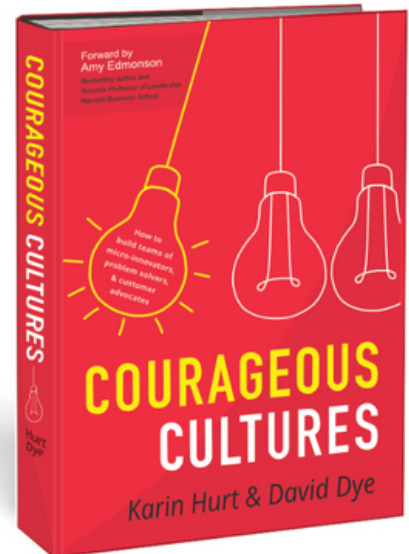
Bring a
Courageous Cultures
Team Innovation Program
or Keynote to Your
Organization

For more practical ways to encourage courage, don't miss our latest book, Powerful Phrases for Dealing With Workplace Conflict: What to Say Next to De-Stress the Workday, Build Collaboration, and Calm Difficult Customers