

A Revolution for Courageous Leadership

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As we explore the world of relationships and sexual violence, it is important that we recognize the opportunities for others to prevent, or at least diminish, the problem. While bystander intervention can be a rather tricky, complex and complicated phenomenon, I believe it is critical to the conversation on sexual assault prevention. Therefore, I have made it my mission to empower others to stand up, step in, and speak out for what's right through RESPONSE ABILITY and our new revolution; however, I do not pretend to have all the answers. I also make it a practice to never tell others *what* to do, knowing that every situation is distinct in its emotions, variables, and personalities.

It is important for all of us to be empowered to do what we already want to do in a critical moment and intervene with some kind of appropriate, effective, and safe action. The role of the bystander has now been elevated by the inclusion of bystander intervention training in the 2013 Clery Act amendments (Campus SaVE Act). Institutions are now required to provide bystander intervention training to every new incoming student and staff member. While all the details of this new requirement are still unknown, it does reflect a new level of awareness and understanding into the critical role of the bystander(s).

Our inclination is often to immediately look to build the skills and strategies needed to intervene; however, I believe we must first explore the inner imperatives that arouse our interest in getting involved in a given situation. As Dr. Alan Berkowitz asked in a blog post for RESPONSE ABILITY, "...where do our deepest impulses come from—our desire to help others, to do the 'right thing,' to not be a bystander, and in many cases, to go against what we have been taught from parents, family and culture? We must look deep within ourselves to seek their origin."

We must now look at our impulse to intervene and better understand where it comes from. Is it innate or a learned behavior? Regardless of the answer, it is imperative that we notice it, listen to it, and, especially, learn from it. Alan goes on to boldly say, "Our emotional, mental and spiritual health requires that we come to terms with it."

These questions are not only powerful for us to ponder and inquire about; they have been the driving force in the creation of *RESPONSE ABILITY: The Revolution for Courageous Leadership*. It is time for all of us to delve deeper into the research of bystander intervention by exploring these impulses and, most importantly, what causes them. We must look at the qualities a human being must have in order to be prepared to stand up, step in, and speak out for what's right. This is what I call "courageous leadership."

I have identified six strengths we must assess and develop within ourselves to be able to display this kind of leadership when called upon. I invite you give yourself a score between one and ten for each of these characteristics. You will then be able to see the gap between where you are now and the kind of person you are committed to being for others.

Integrity

While integrity certainly includes honesty and truthfulness, real integrity goes much



further. Integrity, at its core, is honoring who you say you are. We always have a choice to either honor our commitments in life and who we say we are (our word) or to honor something else: our reasons, justifications, explanations, excuses, or rationalizations. If you say you are committed to making a difference for others and standing up for what is right, then integrity requires you to take the actions correlated to that commitment. From this, we can say that integrity is the foundation of courageous leadership.

Generosity

While simply being kind and generous does not always make *the* difference in a problem situation, it does lay a strong foundation for us to make a difference when needed. If you foster your willingness to do good deeds for others, including perfect strangers, you are developing the qualities that make you the kind of person who will answer the call of duty in a moment of need. Conversely, if you have no interest in these generous gestures, you are less likely to be interested in stepping in and may, therefore, remain a bystander.

Curiosity

The more curious we are, the more aware we are of what the world has to offer and what is going on around us. If we are detached, inattentive, or aloof, we may miss what is happening around us, especially situations that may need our attention. Curiosity also allows us to be interested in others and what is important to them. When we walk through life with a wide-eyed level of engagement, we experience all that life has to offer and we stand a greater chance of recognizing a problem situation that may require our attention.

Equality

A commitment to equality requires that you avoid letting your personal feelings bias your decisions about other people—no matter what justification you may think you have. When you take the well-being of others as seriously as you do your own, you are more likely to take action on their behalf.

Vulnerability

We must be willing to open ourselves up to emotional exposure and be open to uncertainty in any situation. We don't know what will happen—we don't know how things will go; however, we allow ourselves to be exposed to the unforeseen in honor of the difference that can be made for someone in a moment of need. We put our own vulnerability above shame and fear in honor of what's possible.

Bravery

Bravery requires us to go beyond simply doing good for someone by actually taking a risk to our social stature, quality of life, or even our physical well-being. When you refuse to retreat from a threat, challenge, pain or difficulty, you experience courage. Fear will rob us of this strength and can prevent action from being taken. There is no such thing as being fearless—we will always have fear; our real opportunity is to be courageous and acknowledge what we are committed to as more important than our fear.

Now that you have assessed each of these areas of yourself, your challenge is to do the work, get what you need, and fill the gap for each area in order to be the kind of person completely prepared to show courageous leadership.

However, that is not *all* the work to be done. These strengths will make no difference without action. No difference has ever been made –for anyone, at any time–without action being taken. The real opportunity is to translate these strengths into actually standing up, stepping in, and speaking out for what’s right.

While all of this is very simple...it’s not easy.

It takes courage.

It takes courageous leadership.