



DR. **MARGIE WARRELL**

FULLY REVISED **SECOND EDITION**

HOW TO BE
BRAVER IN
YOUR **WORK**,
LEADERSHIP
AND **LIFE**

WILEY

In today's play-it-safe culture, this is a must-read book for anyone who wants to take smarter risks that elevate themselves and others to higher ground. If fear of failing or falling short has ever held you back, this book is for you. Buy it. Read it. Take the leap!

— MARSHALL GOLDSMITH, THINKERS50 WORLD #1 EXECUTIVE
COACH & LEADERSHIP THINKER

Creating a better world requires courage. Stop Playing Safe gives you a roadmap to take the bold action required to move ahead in a world where uncertainty and acceleration are equal realities. If you're looking for an inspired step forward in leadership and life this book is a must read!

— MAYA HARI, VICE PRESIDENT, GLOBAL STRATEGY AND OPERATIONS, TWITTER

Margie is a true expert on the science of success. Her new book is both inspiring and practical. It's a powerful manual for creating the life of your dreams.

— SIMON REYNOLDS, BEST-SELLING AUTHOR OF WHY PEOPLE FAIL

Margie Warrell provides powerful and practical advice for overcoming our innate fear of risk and vulnerability. It bears reading and re-reading for all who strive to become their best selves.

— DR GORDON LIVINGSTON, AUTHOR OF TOO SOON OLD, TOO LATE SMART

Adapting to change and taking chances are critical to your success. This book will help you with both. Get it, read it, enjoy the results.

— JON GORDON, BEST-SELLING AUTHOR OF
THE ENERGY BUS AND THE SEED

Stop Playing Safe provides a roadmap to navigate uncertainty and find the courage to create meaningful changes in your workplace, career and life.

— REBECCA HEINO, PROFESSOR OF MANAGEMENT,
MCDONOUGH SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

One look at the title of my last book, and then this one, should tell you why I like it! Stop Playing Safe will help you harness the courage to take the risks that make sense — and give you the success you want.

— RANDY GAGE, AUTHOR OF THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER
RISKY IS THE NEW SAFE

Stop Playing Safe is more than a book; it's a reference guide for living a full and courageous life. It's one of those rare books that is at once original, inspirational and above all, useful. Margie Warrell is a leading voice in the courage building movement and Stop Playing Safe proves that too much safety can be a dangerous thing.

— BILL TREASURER, PRESIDENT OF GIANT LEAP CONSULTING
AND AUTHOR OF COURAGE GOES TO WORK

Practical, powerful and inspiring. In uncertain times, it's a guidebook you absolutely must read as it spells out exactly how to handle your challenges and find the confidence to speak up and get ahead in the new economy. Everyone in your company should read it!

— SUZI POMERANTZ, BEST-SELLING AUTHOR, MASTER COACH AND
CEO OF INNOVATIVE LEADERSHIP INTERNATIONAL LLC

It's the risks we don't take that we regret the most. Stop Playing Safe will give you the courage to do more, experience more, and regret less. Read it. Apply it. Reap the rewards of a braver life.

— CHESTER ELTON, BEST-SELLING AUTHOR OF THE CARROT PRINCIPLE,
LEADING WITH GRATITUDE AND ANXIETY AT WORK

**STOP
PLAYING
SAFE**

STOP LAYING SAFE

DR. **MARGIE WARRELL**

FULLY REVISED **SECOND EDITION**

HOW TO BE
BRAVER IN
YOUR **WORK**,
LEADERSHIP
AND **LIFE**

WILEY

First published in 2021 by John Wiley & Sons Australia, Ltd

42 McDougall St, Milton Qld 4064

Office also in Melbourne

Typeset in Adobe Caslon Pro 11pt/14.5pt

© John Wiley & Sons Australia, Ltd 2021

The moral rights of the author have been asserted

ISBN: 978-0-730-39458-7



A catalogue record for this book is available from the National Library of Australia

All rights reserved. Except as permitted under the *Australian Copyright Act 1968* (for example, a fair dealing for the purposes of study, research, criticism or review), no part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, communicated or transmitted in any form or by any means without prior written permission. All inquiries should be made to the publisher at the address above.

Cover design by Wiley

Cover author photo: Lisa Sheldon Photography

Internal author photo: Alise Black

Disclaimer

The material in this publication is of the nature of general comment only, and does not represent professional advice. It is not intended to provide specific guidance for particular circumstances and it should not be relied on as the basis for any decision to take action or not take action on any matter which it covers. Readers should obtain professional advice where appropriate, before making any such decision. To the maximum extent permitted by law, the author and publisher disclaim all responsibility and liability to any person, arising directly or indirectly from any person taking or not taking action based on the information in this publication.

CONTENTS

ABOUT MARGIE	ix
PREFACE	xi
INTRODUCTION	xiii

PART I

CORE COURAGE BUILD YOUR FOUNDATION	1
1 KNOW YOUR <i>WHY</i> <i>Decide how you will measure success</i>	3
2 LEAN TOWARDS RISK <i>The odds are better than you think</i>	21
3 BE TRUSTWORTHY <i>Align bold action with right action</i>	49

PART II

WORKING COURAGE UNLOCK DORMANT POTENTIAL	65
4 SPEAK BRAVELY <i>Embrace the discomfort of crucial conversations</i>	67
5 LEARN, UNLEARN AND RELEARN <i>The thinking that got you here won't get you there</i>	87
6 EMBRACE SETBACKS <i>Transform adversity to rise to higher ground</i>	109
7 LEAD BRAVELY <i>Cultivate a culture that fuels courage, not fear</i>	135

PART III

TAKE COURAGE SET YOURSELF UP FOR SUCCESS!	159
8 BACK YOURSELF <i>Don't wait to feel brave... take the leap!</i>	161
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	177
INDEX	179

ABOUT MARGIE

Dr Margie Warrell brings her diverse international experience in business, coaching and psychology — coupled with a deep passion for unlocking the potential that fear often holds hostage — to inspire braver action in today’s increasingly cautious world.



Margie has walked her talk since her childhood growing up in a big family on a small farm in rural Australia. She has lived and worked around the world for more than 25 years, trusted by global brands such as Amazon, Dell, Google, Johnson & Johnson, L’Oreal, Morgan Stanley, NASA and Salesforce to deliver transformative programs that accelerate growth, improve outcomes and strengthen leadership.

A Senior Partner with Korn Ferry’s CEO & Leadership advisory practice, Margie is a passionate advocate for inclusive leadership and advancing more women to decision making tables. Named a Top Voice by LinkedIn, Margie is a member of the board of Forbes School of Business & Technology, she regularly shares her expertise in leading media such as CNN, Bloomberg and *The Wall Street Journal*. Margie also shares insights from her conversations with global leaders and luminaries such as Richard Branson, Steve Forbes, Tony Robbins, Bill Marriott, Dr Phil McGraw, Marianne Williamson and Dr John Demartini in her ‘Courage Work’ *Forbes* column and *Live Brave* podcast.

The titles of Margie’s *Live Brave* podcast and other best-selling books — *Find Your Courage*, *Make Your Mark*, *Train the Brave* and *You’ve Got This!* — reflect the passion she brings to her own leadership and life. Margie also loves adventure travel, especially long hikes in beautiful

places — from climbing Kilimanjaro with her husband and their four brave-hearted children to exploring national parks near her home outside Washington, DC.

A sought after keynote speaker, Margie regularly shares her insights on living and leading more bravely on social media. She'd love to connect with you there and invites you to sign up for her Live Bravely newsletter at www.margiewarrell.com.

PREFACE

The first edition of this book was written nearly a decade ago, during my first year living back in Australia after over a decade in the USA. At the time, many people were still regaining their footing in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis which had shaken their sense of security. As fear ran high, I drew on the insights of leaders I'd worked with, as well as my own research, to help people 'rethink risk' and move boldly forward amid the uncertainty.

This revised second edition has been written after another global move — this time from Singapore back to the USA — and another, even greater, global crisis. I think it's fair to say the COVID-19 pandemic jolted our sense of security and raised the 'fear factor' to whole new levels.

As I witnessed people making irrational decisions driven solely by fear (one person I knew cashed in their entire retirement savings, fearing Armageddon was nigh), I felt compelled to update this book and streamline it.

Of course, there will always be legitimate reasons for going with the safest option. Yet when uncertainty looms large, we must be all the more vigilant to discern between the fears that are serving us and those that are driving us to make overly cautious decisions in our work, in how we live and how we lead. Because while playing it too safe can provide a short-term sense of security, it ultimately keeps us from taking the very actions that would help us become more secure — individually and collectively — over the longer term.

While the world may *feel* like a riskier place today, the truth is that there have always been risks. The difference is that in today's digital 24/7 world, we're now continually bombarded with information that makes life appear riskier. Only when we dare to 'lean towards risk' and venture onto new ground can we seize the opportunities hidden within our challenges,

turning our setbacks into stepping stones, and leading ourselves and others to higher ground and a more, not less, secure world.

So if the title of this book spoke to you, it wasn't by chance. I hope the pages that follow will embolden you to embrace uncertainty and take the risks required to open up new possibilities for you and those around you.

In today's culture of fear, daring to rise above our instinctual desire to play it safe, to take brave action amid the risks, has become ever more imperative.

INTRODUCTION

Please indulge me for just one moment with a little game of ‘make believe’.

Imagine stepping into the shoes of your ‘future self’, ten years from now, looking back on you today, reading this, facing an unknown future but eager to make the most of it.

What would you love to have experienced in your work and career, and in your life outside it? What impact would you love to have made on the lives of others? What skills or mastery would you like to have gained? What kind of person would you like to have become?

Ten years may feel like a long time away right now. Yet you thought that ten years ago and look ... here you are.

So the next ten years is going to pass for you one way or another. The question is, what will you do with it?

Life is the lump sum of our choices. Too often, though, our choices are driven by fear — fear of what might go wrong; fear of not having what it takes; fear of making a fool of ourselves, ‘found out’ as unworthy or inadequate in some way. Often, we’re not even aware of how fear is pulling the invisible strings of our daily decisions but if you’re not waking up inspired by your future, then it most certainly is.

We live in a culture of fear, so it’s little wonder that despite people living longer today than at any point in history — indicating fewer (not more!) threats to our survival — millions of people today spend their lives living in the shadow of fear, continually avoiding what scares them rather than pursuing what inspires them.

The term VUCA was coined to describe the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous nature of modern life. But let’s be honest here — we’ve never had certainty! However, in our overwired lives today, our news

streams bombard us with reasons to bite our nails, stock up on toilet paper and play it safe. Fear has become normalised to the point that we cannot even recognise how many decisions are driven by it.

Yet time and time again history has shown that when fear runs most rampant, brave action reaps the greatest rewards. It's why we must be deliberate not to let fear sit in the driver's seat of our lives. We must commit to being braver — in how we work, live and lead.

Countless times in my own life, from my relatively confined childhood on a small dairy farm in rural Australia to my adult life living around the world from Papua New Guinea to Singapore, I have found that each time I decide to take action in the presence of my fear — to *not* play life safe — I dilute the power fear holds over me and amplify my own.

The world has weathered one heck of a storm since the first edition of this book. Before the COVID-19 pandemic I used to write about how afraid some people were of killer viruses and how unlikely a pandemic actually is. Well ... the unlikely event happened and most of us were caught off guard anyway. It triggered a cascading crisis that dialled up the fear factor in our homes and communities, in our schools and organisations, and at decision-making tables the world over.

Left unchecked, fear can narrow our thinking, derail our decision-making and keep us from seeing, much less seizing, the opportunities that always exist amid disruption, although often out of plain sight. It can also drive us to over-estimate the risks, making us suffer more from our fear than from the source of it.

It's why, in this VUCA world we inhabit, the thinking and behaviours that got you to where you are today will be insufficient to take you to where you want to be ten years from now. As the world has changed, so too must you change how you engage in it.

I have written this book because I hold a deep and unwavering belief in our potential as ‘human becomings’ to create lives rich in meaning and to move all humanity to higher ground. Yet in my work that spans many countries, cultures and continents, I constantly encounter people trapped inside prisons of their own making, hemmed in by the borders of their own imagination, living under the long shadow of fear.

The truth is that you have all the resources within you to create a deeply meaningful and rewarding life, regardless of what you’ve done (or failed to do) before, or what is going on in your life right now. However, if you sometimes wonder otherwise, you’re not alone. Global employee surveys tell us that millions of people think that what they do each day doesn’t matter and that they are powerless to change their environment. The cost to the commercial bottom line is in the billions. The cost to the human spirit is immeasurable. Underlying this disengagement is fear in many guises — of failure, success, rejection, exposure, not having enough ... of not *being* enough.

Countless business books are filled with strategies for becoming a more proficient networker, strategist, salesperson, negotiator, ‘hi-po’ employee and leader. Very few address the deep-seated fears and complex interplay of unconscious cognitive biases that form the human condition, and that keep us from applying them.

While this book is written for you, the individual, it will benefit any team, enterprise or organisation. After all, organisations are made up of people. As such, people are their number one resource and the fear that stifles their potential — their creativity, collaboration and collective ingenuity — is their number one threat. No organisation can compete in today’s world unless those who are part of it feel emboldened to ‘push the envelope’ of possibility. This entails risk and demands courage.

This book comprises eight chapters, divided into three parts.

Part I: *Core Courage* (chapters 1 to 3) forms the foundation for all good decision making and forward-leaning action.

Part II: *Working Courage* (chapters 4 to 7) provides concepts and practical strategies to be more courageous and effective in handling the challenges and seizing the opportunities in your work and life.

Part III: *Take Courage* (chapter 8) is where the rubber hits the road as you make the changes that prompted you to pick up this book in the first place. Part III will set you up for success, creating an environment that emboldens you to take smarter risks and pave new pathways toward your biggest future and a better world.

Back in 2019, none of us could have imagined in our wildest dreams that in 2020 the world would be knocked off its axis with the cascading crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet in the midst of having to deal with challenges we never expected, much less planned for, many people discovered within themselves more courage, tenacity and resilience than they knew they had.

None of us can know what challenges the years ahead will bring. The world is changing so fast, it's hard to imagine what it will look like two years from now, much less 20. All of which begs the question: what mindset will you adopt to navigate the uncertainty ahead? Because in the end what matters far less than the challenges you face is the mindset you bring to them.

As uncertain as this time in human history is, one thing remains certain: only those who are willing to fling their arms wide to the full spectrum of human experience will be able to seize the opportunities that surround each of us every single day. In the end, there is no success without the possibility of failure. As Helen Keller said, 'Life is either a daring adventure or nothing at all.'

PART I

CORE COURAGE

BUILD YOUR FOUNDATION

Courage is the price that life exacts for granting peace.

AMELIA EARHART

1

KNOW YOUR WHY

Decide how you will measure success

If we do not believe within ourselves this deeply rooted feeling that there is something higher than ourselves, we shall never find the strength to evolve into something higher.

RUDOLF STEINER

You've read the stories. Of the accidental hero diving into a frozen river or lifting a car many times their body weight to rescue a total stranger. Of the desperate mother walking hundreds of miles under the blistering sun to seek help for her child.

In the face of impossible odds, people have tapped into reserves of seeming superhuman power, unlocking strength, courage and steel-like determination that would otherwise have lain dormant. And often not just for their own sake, but for the sake of someone else. Sometimes even a complete stranger.

Perhaps you've experienced such a moment in your own life where you've tapped into a deeper source of power and courage within you; perhaps that almost surprised you. Maybe you found yourself in your own 'impossible' predicament, but resolved that nothing was going to stop you.