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INTERACTION

THE NEUROSCIENCE OF COURAGE

Interaction Opinion – Brigid Hardy

Courage - it means different things to different people. At Interaction, courage is one of our core company values, often the first value I focus on with new team members. It takes guts to be a consultant that delivers results, and we often reward the act of courage more so than the results.

But can we build courage, or is it just something we're born with?

At the heart of courage lies the amygdala, a small part of the brain that handles emotions. Studies have shown that if the amygdala is damaged, people become less sensitive to fear, often doing things that most others would normally avoid. Having a properly working amygdala is key to feeling fear, which is a big part of courage.

But courage isn't just about not being scared; it's about facing fear and doing it anyway. That's where the prefrontal cortex, the brain's decision-maker, comes in. It looks at signals from the amygdala and other parts of the brain, weighing up the risks and rewards of each situation. Then, it decides what to do, sometimes telling us to do things despite the fear. This is called cognitive reappraisal - when you consciously see scary stuff in a different, less scary way, so you can deal with it better.

Plus, there are some brain chemicals that help too. Dopamine, which we call the "feel-good" hormone, gets released when we are doing, or about to do, something pleasurable. More dopamine can make us more willing to take risks, so it might help pump up our courage. And serotonin, which keeps our mood balanced, seems to help us bounce back from tough times and feel less anxious, which can help us be more brave.

So, how do we get braver? Well, one way is by facing our fears. Exposure therapy is all about gradually getting used to scary stuff, so it doesn't scare us as much over time. It's like building up a resistance to fear, making us tougher in the face of challenges.

Having support can also give us a boost of courage. When we're surrounded by people who cheer us on, it's easier to take risks. And seeing others be brave can inspire us to do the same.

Finally, changing how we think about scary stuff can make a big difference too. By flipping negative thoughts into more positive ones, we can approach challenges with a can-do attitude, ready to take them on.

So, courage isn't just something we're born with - it's something we can grow and develop over time. By facing our fears, getting support from others, and changing how we think, we can become braver versions of ourselves.

Are you ready to cultivate your courage? Take the first step today by challenging yourself to face one fear head-on. Share your courageous act with us and inspire others to do the same! Together, let's embrace bravery and unlock our full potential.