

The Courage to Continue: Turning Dreams into Reality



Bouncing Back From Setbacks

The Center for Career & Life Transition
Building Bridges For Change

A Resource From CCLT



theCCLT.com

The Courage to Continue: Turning Dreams into Reality

“Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.”

Winston Churchill

Sometimes, as you pursue your ideal career, you may feel you have come up against a brick wall and don't know what to do next. It may seem as though everything you're trying to accomplish and everyone who was supposed to support you are erecting barriers, telling you to STOP! Stopping is an option, but it is an option that can remove your dreams and goals from your ideal future.



Before you make a decision to stop, you *must* take a breath and pause. You *must* look at all your options before you decide what to do next. Looking at your options begins with looking at yourself. Look in the mirror; what do you see? Is that face filled with steadfast determination or with shadowy thoughts of giving up? Take a look at that face through a different lens and you may be surprised at what you find.

Three Steps to Possibilities

- Step One: Control what you can control.
- Step Two: Influence what you can influence.
- Step Three: Make what is impossible today, possible tomorrow.

Step One: Control What You Can Control

Behind that face is a level of self-control you may not remember you have. You DO have control over what you say; what you do; and even though you may not always believe it, you CAN have control over how you feel. While you are pursuing your dreams, others may not understand the vision you have or may say something hurtful, but you can choose not to feel hurt. Others can say things that are discouraging, but you can choose not to feel discouraged. How you feel and how you respond to the world around you as you pursue your dreams depend on the amount of control you have over your thoughts, feelings, words, and actions.

The Spheres of Influence can help manage the barriers that are holding you back from achieving your ideal career. The Spheres of Influence consists of three concentric circles with the innermost circle containing everything in your life you *can* control: your dream of your ideal career; how you choose to communicate with others



who are supporting you or getting in your way; what you believe about what you can and can't do; your attitudes, actions, reactions, and feelings.

Because we are all influenced by our pasts, some of what you believe about yourself is left over from previous life experiences. If those experiences were unpleasant, you need to discard that emotional baggage you may still be carrying around with you. A significant challenge to removing unwanted emotional baggage is how you feel when you are faced with the tug between your thoughts and your feelings. The thinking side of your brain may tell you that with hard work and perseverance you can achieve any dream you want, while the feeling side reminds you of the dangers of taking risks or previous failures. Paying attention to the messages from both sides of your brain as *information*, not as fact, is a key to staying in control.

When you feel yourself reacting to a thought or feeling that is telling you to STOP, don't disregard it, but question its validity. Is it information, or is it verifiable fact? Ask yourself if what you are feeling is based on *real evidence* from the world you live in today or remnants of experiences in a previous job or perhaps even from when you were a child.

Staying in control of what you feel, do, or say is about understanding who you are and who you want to be. When you are confronted by a barrier you believe is insurmountable, and you feel yourself losing control over your behavior or what is going on in your head, use one of the tips below to get yourself back in control.

1. **QTIP:** If someone says something hurtful or discouraging, **Quit Taking It Personally (QTIP)**. Too often, others' advice about what you can or can't do is based on what *they* would feel, think, or fear in your situation; but they are not you! Accept their advice graciously, but listen to *your* inner voice. Sadly, many of us make assumptions that others know more about us than we do. When someone tells you, "You shouldn't" ... "You can't" ... "It's too risky," QTIP, and validate other people's assumptions before you take action.
2. **Give yourself a time out.** Just like with children, adults benefit from a few minutes away from an intense situation in order to regain self-control. Instead of responding with negativity when you read, hear, or see something that you feel is a roadblock to progress, take a deep breath, and walk away from the person or the situation. Tell the other person why you are walking away. Then, when you are back in charge of your thoughts, feelings, and behavior, approach the issue and the person with confidence and self-control.
3. **Visualize success:** See yourself in the career of your dreams. Put on the uniform, smell the ocean, see the office, or feel the breeze. Greg Louganis, Olympic gold medal high-diving champion, made visualization famous when he watched himself make a perfect dive in his mind's-eye and then follow his vision. What's your vision? How do you look in it?
4. **Compose and use a mantra:** Before you become totally overwhelmed, create an affirmation, and say it to calm yourself and regain self-control, e.g., "I feel calm. I can manage this. This is doable." (Affirmations can't be negative.) Think of *The Little Engine that*

Could. Against all odds it pulled the train up the steepest hill. Can you find the strength and stamina to equal that feat?

5. **Do some math:** On a scale of 1-10 how big of a roadblock is this? Is this a barrier that will affect your total life or just a small milestone along the way?

Ask Yourself:

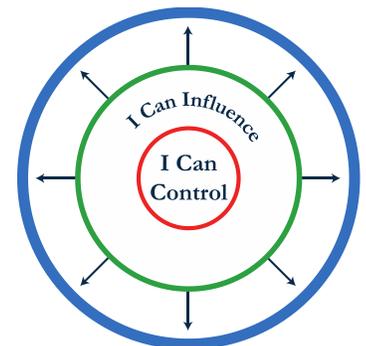
1. What is a potential barrier I need to examine to find out if it is still valid today?

2. How will I find evidence to help me make a good decision about whether the barrier is real or an illusion left over from my past?

Step Two: Influence What You Can Influence

Once you gain control over your thoughts and feelings, a magical thing begins to happen: You are able to exert more influence on your world and the barriers that are getting in your way. You may not fully recognize the impact of your new-found self-confidence on others or in a given situation, but the impact is real. The law of social reciprocity (you get what you give) kicks in and begins to reinforce the confidence you need to dismantle those barriers and keep you on your path to your dream.

Steve Jobs, the legendary founder of Apple computers, wasn't an inventor. He didn't invent the computer or the cell phone or even the tablet. He knew where his strengths were and where his limitations were; so he surrounded himself with the best people, and together they made the impossible possible. He was told thousands, if not millions, of times, "That wouldn't work," but we all know his response. Steve Jobs and thousands of others we read or hear about



every day, and millions of others we never read or hear about, managed barriers and achieved what may seem impossible. They did it by controlling their thoughts and feelings and continually expanding their spheres of influence. You may not have the tenacity of a Steve Jobs, but you do have the ability to continually expand your sphere of influence. It all starts with self-control and focused determination.

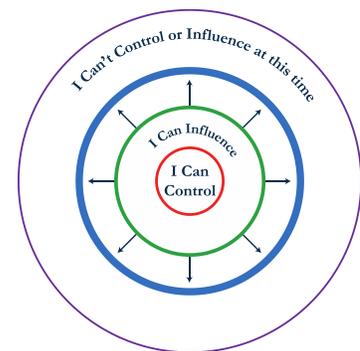
Ask Yourself:

1. Who or what do I need to influence to help me overcome this barrier?

2. What might I be able to do, say, think, or feel differently in order to make an impact on that person or situation, differently than I have in the past?

Step Three: Make What's Not Possible Today, Possible Tomorrow

Positive mental attitude has become the mantra of salespeople and public speakers all over the world. Their message seems to suggest that the right thinking can help you overcome anything. Even though it's a great idea, it's not always enough. Right thinking can't help you overcome cancer, but it CAN help you live a full, productive life and manage the disease's effects. Right thinking can't bring back a deceased loved one, but it CAN help you grieve in a way that allows you to heal and find the energy to create and move into a new life.



My grandmother carried a card in her wallet that none of us ever knew she had. We discovered it after she died, and we started going through her possessions. The card had on it the following:

Grant me the Serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the Courage to change the things I can, and Wisdom to know the difference.

Serenity is the magical state that occurs when you feel in control of yourself, even if real barriers are in the way *for now*. The outer sphere of influence suggests that there are times when you need to accept a genuine roadblock and remain calm enough to try again when some time has passed and allowed you to overcome, dismantle or work around that barrier.

Time is an amazing agent of change, always working invisibly in the background. What was true last year or even last month may now be in question. Is it healthier to eat butter or margarine? Was Pluto the last discovered planet or was Uranus? What was thought to be untrue or impossible last year may be acceptable now and possibly even the wave of the future. How many grandmothers and grandfathers are Skyping with their kids, grandkids, and great grandkids when no one thought they could even use a computer?

What you see as a barrier may be one, stopping your progress temporarily but not permanently. It may just be a limitation you can navigate through or around with more information, resources, or energy. Or maybe it really is an illusion that isn't a block or limit at all. Maybe the roadblock exists only in your own mind, and by checking your beliefs and looking for evidence, you will find that what you thought was impossible is very doable.

Ask Yourself:

1. What will I look or listen for so that I will know that enough time has passed that I am ready to overcome this barrier?

2. What will I do to keep myself upbeat and in control while I am preparing myself for my new future?
