

Get gutsy

You may never scale a cliff, but certain feats—for instance, moving to a new city or going on a blind date—require their own kind of daring. “True courage involves doing the right thing despite the potential consequences,” says Cynthia Pury, Ph.D., associate professor of psychology at Clemson University in South Carolina. Shore up your nerve with this advice and you’ll be ready to test your mettle no matter what challenge you’re up against. By Catherine Ryan

DANGLE A CARROT Most people who psych themselves up to do something scary have focused consciously on why they should take that chance, research from Clemson University finds. “It’s easier to take a risk if you have motivation for putting yourself out there,” study coauthor Pury observes. So ease your fears about starting a new job by recalling your initial reasons for the switch (to gain valuable experience), and you’ll stride into your new office with a smile.

TAP YOUR INNER CIRCLE A strong social network can help you feel safe enough to take on a challenge that’s in your best interest. “Knowing friends or family members believe in you, even if they’re not physically present, can push you to do things you might have thought impossible,” Rate explains. Knowing that after you’ve finally dumped the bad-for-you boyfriend, your buds will be standing by with chick flicks and Häagen-Dazs doesn’t hurt, either.

GIVE YOURSELF CREDIT Courage isn’t about not being scared—it’s about acting *despite* fear. When you recall all the times you’ve pulled off gutsy moves, such as when you traveled abroad alone, “you begin to think of yourself as courageous,” says Colonel Sean Hannah, Ph.D., who researches leadership at the United States Military Academy at West Point in New York. Try to recall daring moments and you’ll develop a reservoir of confidence for your next herculean feat.

REHEARSE FIRST

Acting courageously isn’t necessarily instinctual—even soldiers have to train to do brave things in battle. But you can teach yourself to make bold choices in your everyday life. By imagining how you’d like to behave in challenging circumstances (e.g., seeing yourself calmly standing up to a bullying colleague), “you will hone your decision making so it takes less time to act in reality,” says Lieutenant Colonel Christopher Rate, Ph.D., of the U.S. Special Operations Command, MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida.