



COURAGEOUS  
LEADERSHIP

# Courageous Democracy

A COURAGEOUS LEADERSHIP, LLC PROGRAM

## COLLECTIVE COURAGE FOR A DIVIDED SOCIETY

Essential for a sustainable democracy, is “collective courage” – the ability of the people to act with open hearts and minds in the face of fear or discomfort from ideological, cultural or social differences. Collective courage is a set of behavioral habits consisting of learned skills, built through practice with social support, and honed through work on shared goals.

And yet, the last election in the United States illustrated the extent to which people are divided across ideological



difference and have increasing disdain and ill will for people outside their group. At the same time, there’s been an uptick in the percentage of Americans who report wanting to get involved, or actually are getting involved (many for the first time), in building a more caring, sustainable democracy. Pursuing different policies, politicians, reforms, or structural programs (although important) will not address this underlying tension.

In the wake of the election there is an increased desire to get involved and reach across divides, in many cases this desire is not matched with collective or individual

courage; this can make a bad situation worse. There’s good reason for caution: a profusion of psychological research (moral, social and evolutionary) illustrates why acting in an open-hearted, open-minded way across difference can, in practice, be incredibly hard.

But with training, we can effectively reach across the divides.

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*Courageous Leadership, LLC created the Courageous Democracy Initiative to provide evidence-based tools to reach across widening political divides and create a more caring, inclusive, sustainable democracy.*

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# A Courageous Democracy Pilot

## COLLECTIVE COURAGE FOR A DIVIDED SOCIETY

### What is it?

With the generous support of a large foundation, we will pilot a replicable, scalable, and durable method for enhancing the quality of the political culture and conversations. This includes; the empathy people feel for “others” (perceived as unlike themselves politically), the ability to build a shared sense of “we,” and the capacity to find productive, shared solutions across difference, at the local level. We ultimately seek to alter our collective mindset about difference or conflict: instead of being a problem, difference can be a powerful source for improving our understanding, and for increasing our collective capacity to better approach and solve the challenges of our time.

We will train and support groups in the social and moral psychology of hyper-partisanship and how social influences affect human perspective, behavior and effectiveness in all areas, including civic action, business and personal life. Starting with a ½ day workshop, we will provide evidence-based tools for building the awareness, skills and social support needed for “Courageous Conversations” and courageous actions across difference. Following the workshop, we will support participants with diverse political opinions, to continue practicing with the tools for courageous conversations over the course of six months while working on a local issue.

### Why Courageous Democracy?

The Courageous Democracy Project is a collaboration among Courageous Leadership, The Village Square, and Civil Politics. Courageous Leadership programs are built on social science. Over eight years of working with colleagues and advisors, (including Phil Zimbardo, Lynne Henderson, Paul Gilbert, Kim Cameron), we created an interactive program to help leaders and teams in organizations. Our programs help people recognize invisible systemic influences and subtle social cues, manage internal reactions under stress, and override unhelpful human reactions (e.g., otherizing, avoiding, and lashing out). We train people to more-consistently act with compassion, ethical courage and ingenuity. Courageous Leadership’s programs and evidence-based tools have been used with clients like Google, MIT Sloan, Kaiser Permanente, the Hewlett Foundation, Columbia Medical Center, the Australian Healthcare, Justice, and Treasury Directorates, Post Carbon Institute, American Leadership Forum, and others.

The last election illustrated the extent to which Americans are divided across ideological difference and have increasing disdain and ill will for people outside their group. In a survey conducted by the American Psychological Association in 2017, more than half of Americans surveyed reported that the current political climate is a significant source of stress; and 66 percent say the same about the future of our country.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> American Psychological Association (2017). Stress in America: Coping with Change. Stress in America Survey.

## Want to Participate?

Please contact us at [www.thecourage2lead.com](http://www.thecourage2lead.com) to apply.