

Bold and Brave: Why Presence Matters as Much as Performance

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Succeeding in the workplace is not just about what you know or what you can do — it's also about how you show up.

Skill matters. Experience matters. And increasingly, *presence* matters just as much. So what does it really mean to be bold and brave at work?

For a long time, being *bold* carried a slightly uncomfortable reputation — outspoken, brazen, perhaps even risky. Being *brave* could be seen as career-limiting: speaking up when others stayed silent, challenging behaviour, or naming the elephant in the room.

Today, those same qualities are being redefined.

Bold and brave leadership now looks far more like:

- curiosity rather than bravado
- confidence without ego
- courage grounded in respect
- asking the questions no one else is asking — but everyone is thinking

In time, these won't be labelled as standout traits at all. They'll simply be *how work gets done*.

What Does Bold and Brave Look Like in Practice?

See how many of these resonate with you:

- I ask questions others aren't asking (at least not out loud)
- I allow questions to be asked of me
- I make it safe for people to make mistakes
- I know my strengths and communicate them clearly
- I speak up for others and have their back
- I actively seek feedback (positive and constructive) — and act on what I hear
- I am comfortable both giving and receiving constructive feedback
- I am kind to myself
- I build relationships beyond my immediate team, role or region
- I walk the talk
- I take considered risks
- I demonstrate courage when risk is present
- I show up authentically and stay true to myself in workplace interactions
- I give credit generously and appropriately
- I take full accountability for my actions

Boldness and bravery aren't grand gestures. More often, they're a series of small, consistent choices.

Why Speaking Up Matters

We're learning — repeatedly — that the *real value* often sits inside the questions that aren't being asked.

Progress, innovation and better decisions rely on people feeling safe enough to:

- challenge assumptions
- explore “what if?” scenarios
- contribute ideas before they're fully formed

This is where creativity lives — what Edward de Bono describes as the *Green Hat* space — and it can only exist when people feel psychologically safe to speak up.

Leaders and colleagues also need to be mindful of different communication preferences.

Some people think out loud. Others need time to reflect. Some are energised by discussion; others prefer considered input.

The goal isn't for everyone to speak up in the same way — it's for *everyone's voice to be heard* in a way that drives outcomes.

Why Don't People Speak Up?

There are many reasons people stay silent, including:

- a preference for introversion
- uncertainty about how to contribute
- previous negative experiences

Many of us can recall a moment where we were shut down or dismissed. I still remember being publicly discouraged by a leader for suggesting a new process — told it had been tried before I joined and “didn't work”. While probably unintended, the impact was real. I stayed quiet for several meetings afterwards until my confidence returned.

Moments like these linger — and they shape behaviour far more than we realise.

Practical Tips for Speaking Up (Even When It Feels Uncomfortable)

One executive once shared a simple but powerful piece of advice with new starters: *Even if you think you have nothing valuable to add, don't be silent.*

This isn't about speaking for the sake of it — it's about being present and visible.

Some practical, low-risk ways to contribute include:

- **Asking a question:**
"I'd love to understand more about..."
- **Building on another's contribution:**
"I echo Jane's thinking on the proposed solution."
- **Acknowledging value gained:**
"This discussion has given me an extra layer of insight — thank you."
- **Seeking feedback** on how you come across and how you can continue to grow

Presence is built through consistency, not perfection.

A final thought

Bold and brave behaviour isn't reserved for the loudest voices or the most senior roles. It's available to all of us — in how we ask questions, support others, take responsibility, and show up authentically.

So, take a reflective pause:

- Which of these behaviours comes naturally to you?
- Which one stretches you just a little?
- And what might change if you practised that one, consistently?

That's usually where the growth begins.