

Column: Courage is the key to success

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By Regina Banks-Hall Special to MediaNews Group

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Early in my quest to earn a doctorate degree, I purchased a velvet tam to motivate myself to keep going. Many people told me I couldn't achieve a PhD, and I knew they were wrong. So I took a picture of that cap and kept it on my phone to glance at whenever the going got tough or I started to doubt my abilities. I even started calling myself "Dr. Banks-Hall" before I had the degree in hand. That required me to work hard so I didn't disappoint myself by not fulfilling my goal.

As we celebrate Women's History Month and International Women's Day, we cheer on trailblazing women and admire their accomplishments. But the message we really need to share is that it takes courage to be successful and to get there, women must overcome the natural fears that lurk deep within.

Regardless of size, color, or job description, you must value yourself and know that you belong – wherever you want to be. If it's owning a business, becoming a professor, or advancing to management, you must value yourself in order to find the courage to press forward with your goals.

Every day, I drive to Howell, a small Midwestern town, where I am building and leading a robust graduate studies program at a small business university. This town was not historically known for attracting a diverse population. Still, as an African-American woman, I come every day, believing I belong because I am educated, I am qualified, and I know the value I bring.

Because I believe it, other people started to as well.

Not only do I have the credentials to belong – I carry myself with an air of acceptance that inspires others to get on board. It starts with me.

There have been people throughout my life and career who have cast doubt on my ability to progress. Every time someone expressed a negative notion about what I could accomplish, I pushed back and turned their naysaying into motivation. People have told me that it would be too hard to write a book. I've written and published six. People tried to discourage me from pursuing a doctorate degree. I got to the finish line, and you absolutely must call me Doctor now.

I started a business, and when my husband retired and I accepted an academic position, he became my employee. I know I have value, and so does he.

I am where I am today because courage drives my mindset, ignoring the fear that inevitably creeps in from time to time.

We make progress not because of our talents or skills, degrees or certifications. We progress because of attitude and action. I can accomplish anything I want to as long as I believe in myself. That's the mantra we must share with all women this month, and always.

Over the years, I've learned three things that help stamp out fear and build courage.

1. **Strengthen Your Mindset.** Change the way you see yourself. View yourself as the person you want to be. Visualize, like I did with the graduation cap. When you can see yourself at the finish line, you have a better chance of getting there.

2. Examine Your Inner Circle. The people you surround yourself with can make or break you. I've had to let people go because their negativity thwarted my momentum. Know who's for you and who's against you. Invite positive people in, and send the doubters packing.

3. Level Up. Make sure you are connected to people at a higher level than you. If you are the smartest person in your circle, you need to expand your circle. Find successful women who've gone farther than you and learn from them. Turn them into mentors. Then do the same for younger women coming up behind you.

Fear of success comes from doubting your ability, and that grows from other people planting negative seeds. It can start when we're very young; we may not even notice!

Often when people say you shouldn't do something, it's because they fear that you will succeed and surpass them, and they want to hold on to the version of you that is familiar. They don't want to move forward, so they can't let you, either.

That's unfortunate. This Women's History Month, let's look for females who lift each other up – so we can all go higher together.

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