

Where does **courage** come from?

My name is **Alan McSmith**, and I am a wilderness guide. And these are my thoughts about my home continent of Africa.

I don't believe that anyone can deny our world is currently experiencing great social, economic and environmental turbulence. Humanity is facing its greatest challenges in the history of our time. And if there is a single salient point that binds peoples of all nationalities, religions and cultures of our current age in agreement for a change, perhaps it would be this: your world requires a new and dynamic approach to leadership to embrace change.

Albert Einstein once said: "The world we have created today has problems which cannot be solved by thinking the way we thought when we created them." These timeless words of advice, implying the need to change and adapt, cut to the bone. The same applies in nature; a world millions of miles from Einstein's one of science and logic. Because nothing is stagnant in nature. Systems and balances evolve, survival techniques advance, and



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connections constantly develop. And if you spend time in wilderness, you discover how pertinent these epicentres of change in fact are in us, even within the lives of modern societies.

And just as this suggests how connected we still are to our natural world, we, just as nature is, are never stagnant. Or shouldn't be. Just as nature never stands still, our spirits are the same. We either progress or we digress, and of the two, when it comes to pivotal personal and professional transformation, progress is by far the most necessary and vibrant option. But, change is fearful. Society has mined our minds to believe this. Change takes courage. But where can we find reservoirs of courage to deal with impending change and transformation, particularly if comfort and security is at stake?

PUSHING THE BOUNDARY

I believe that the wilderness trail experience suggests some clues. The encounter can open the doors to a deeper understanding and appreciation of our natural world, and can inspire and encourage both change and courage.

Of all the discoveries a wilderness trail can afford us, perhaps the most meaningful is the opportunity to explore your own self. Because it's when you are closest to yourself, do you discover a more effective

understanding of your strengths versus weaknesses, fears versus insecurities, and priorities versus projections. And by pushing the physical and spiritual boundary somewhat, nature can provide a bridge between yourself and the uncharted, wilder parts of your life. A humbling yet invigorating process.

To illustrate this, I invite you to participate in the following exercise. Firstly, take some time to compile a mental list of the most inspirational people in your life. There can be five names, ten or twenty. So for now, please stop reading further until you have completed your list – you will soon discover why. Only once you are ready, please answer the following question: did you have yourself on the list? If not, how come?

If you did, you are definitely in the minority. It's a question that challenges our notion of relying elsewhere for a source of inspiration, rather than from within our own selves. Perhaps society suggests that this is arrogant or big-headed. But if you make use of the humility and dignity of nature to research your list, it appears to be a perfectly reasonable assumption to make.

Our mentors come and go, be they school teachers, colleagues, bosses, businessmen or sport stars. But only true and durable inspiration can be found from within your own self, and finding the courage to rock the society boat by admitting this, can be a challenge.



RECONNECTING WITH NATURE

What we can learn from nature is the courage to reconnect with these natural tendencies again. And nature is all around us. In fact nature is more of a process than a place. For example, the next time you experience a conflict situation at the office, take it for a walk in a forest. Remove all concerned – the herd – from the boardroom and enjoy a walk in silence, saying nothing of the problem at hand, and download together. I believe the next boardroom session will be far more productive and mutual, and you will feel the courage move from the forest to the office.

Or if you are facing a crossroads or a decision in your life, no matter how insignificant, take its shoes off and go walk on the beach. Take it fishing, bird watching or sailing. Allow yourself moments in nature that have no barriers. History has shown us that the most influential and globally respected world leaders such as Gandhi and Mandela have spent much time in nature, disarming themselves in it by dismantling barriers and crossing divides. Courage can often be found in the small things around us. ■

 [Alan McSmith on YouTube](#)

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Our innate connection with nature, I believe, also ensures that we have an instinctive tendency to ‘do what is best’ for our community or circles of influence. We are unconsciously inclined to benefit the ‘herd’, and in return, assure ourselves of affection, love and support. Unfortunately this natural instinct has been eroded over time, with society deeming personal gain, power and nepotism as the norm. As a result, and when we need them the most, our reservoirs of self-inspiration and courage run dry.