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When Arrogance is a Good Thing

By Dr. Erich Longie

The dictionary defines arrogance as the act or habit of “making undue claims in an overbearing manner” or making exorbitant claims of power (Thinkexist.com, 2010). Based on this description, how can I say there is a time when arrogance is a good thing?



I have faced many challenges over the course of my 56 -- soon to be 57 -- years. Some challenges have been more difficult than others.

As a kid, I faced the challenge of having to make sure logs were sawed, split, and carried into the house each night during the winter. Somehow, the winters back then seemed colder, longer, and snowier. It didn't matter how cold or stormy it was, I had to do my chore (My younger brother's, Mark's, job was to haul or pump water every day.). Maybe this is when I



learned the value of hard work and perseverance.

Growing up in a big family, everything was shared: the work, the food, the clothes, and even the praise we gave each other. As we grew older, whatever materialistic items we obtained for ourselves (candy, toys, gloves/mittens, comic books, books, etc.), we always shared with our brothers and sisters. It was through these actions that I learned the value of generosity (Unfortunately, as we grew older, this included alcohol, and several of us family members became alcoholics, but that is another story.).

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When I finished grade school, there was no high school on our reservation to attend. I had no choice but to go to an off-reservation all-white

high school about 30 miles away. I climbed on the bus on Sunday afternoon and returned home Friday evening. Having never spent very much time off the reservation or among non-Indians, it took all my courage to get on that bus for the first time and leave my family and our “cozy” log cabin for an entire week.



As for the values of honesty...?! Somehow, honesty was taught to us from the time we were able to understand the spoken word.

As I've stated several times in my previous writing, I am the first to admit, when I became a young adult, I did not always follow the values that I learned as a child. However, these values would surface at difficult times in my life and help me endure whatever hardship I was facing.



It took enormous amounts of courage and perseverance to endure the training activities at and graduate from Marine Corps boot camp. When I broke my back in two places in a car accident when I was 29 years old, the doctor said I had a

one-in-ten chance of walking again. Again, courage and perseverance came to my rescue. Another time these virtues came into play was during the time I spent at the University of North Dakota (UND), where I earned three degrees despite the racism directed at me due to the University's use of a “Fighting Sioux” logo and mascot.



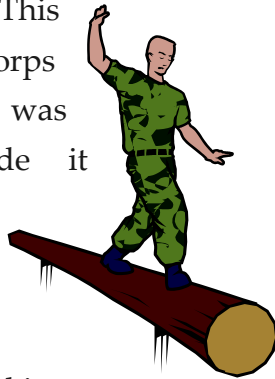
Yet, while it may sound strange, it was not just courage, honesty, perseverance, and generosity that helped me through some of the toughest times in my life, but my arrogance aided me as well.

Let me explain:

I did not realize what I had gotten myself into when I joined the U.S. Marine Corps. We arrived at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego around two in the morning. A drill instructor (DI) came on the bus and started shouting at us. We were herded off the bus and onto a row of painted feet on the tarmac, all the while getting hollered and screamed at by the DIs. Then, we were sent running to a barbershop, and within two minutes all our hair was shaved off. It was 3 a.m. when we went to bed. We were up at 5:30 a.m., and by the end of that first day, I knew it would take all my determination and willpower to make it through boot camp.

However, several weeks into the training, as I observed other recruits struggling to do

activities I found easy, I began to feel arrogant toward them and the training. This was not unusual; the Marine Corps trains you to be that way. It was this arrogance, which made it possible to handle anything the DIs threw at me. It made the rest of boot camp “easy.”



Several years later, after breaking my back in a car accident, I was not expected to walk again. Again, I knew that it would take all my courage and perseverance, to prove the doctor wrong. Following two years of strenuous physical rehabilitation, I was finally able to walk – well, walk with a limp -- without the use of a cane or crutch.



Learning to walk again did not come easy. At the beginning of rehab, I was told to attend a training session where I would be taught to cook from a wheelchair. When the occupational therapist wheeled me into a room with a table and appliances at wheelchair level, I immediately ordered her to take me out of there. From then on, I refused to participate in that therapy, and a battle of wills ensued between the occupational therapist and myself. Eventually, a priest was even sent into my room. I promptly chased him out.

What they didn't understand was I “just knew” (which is a nice way of referring to my arrogance) that I was not going to spend the rest

of my life in a wheelchair, no matter what the doctor said. But, I also knew whether or not I would walk again depended on my attitude. And I did not want any doubt creeping into my mind, because I knew all it would take was a little doubt, and I would spend the rest of my life in a wheelchair. In my opinion, attending classes where I would learn to cook from a wheelchair might inadvertently weaken my resolve to walk again; therefore, I absolutely refused to attend those classes.

When I attended UND and had to endure racism spawned by the Fighting Sioux logo and mascot, I never once thought of quitting school because of it. Instead, my attitude became arrogant.

“I’ll be damned if I will quit because of them,” I vowed. “I have just as much right to attend school here.”

I was not going to let anyone scare me away. While I’ve been a vocal opponent of the logo recently, when I was a student I didn’t go looking for or start any angry debates about the logo. In fact, for the most part, I avoided any conversation concerning the issue.

At the same time, I made it clear that my reluctance to be drawn into a debate was not to be mistaken for weakness. The times I did enter into an argument about the logo and mascot, I did so with an



attitude of arrogance and contempt towards my adversaries — and it worked. I always had the last word.



Now, I am faced with the most serious challenge of my life, my battle with prostate cancer. Once prostate cancer has spread to the lymph nodes (as it has in my case), and beyond, it is virtually incurable. Now, I have to call on all my determination and willpower, (or courage and perseverance) to combat the disease. But courage and perseverance is not going to be enough. I have to be absolutely certain I will beat the disease, and this is where my arrogance will come in.

Two weeks ago, I had my four-month check up with my doctor. My PSA was 0.06, which was the same as my last check up. Although the doctor said this was excellent and that I have five years to live, I still was depressed for a

couple of days after I left the doctor's office. After all, who likes to be reminded that they have only five years to live?

Then Wednesday evening, it suddenly occurred to me, the first time the doctor said I had five years to live was over a year ago. By saying I had five years to live Monday meant he was wrong last year. Otherwise, with a year gone by, he should have said I had less than five years. "My, how time has flown," I thought. For some reason, I had thought only a couple of months had gone by since the last time he gave me the bad news. Knowing I had already proved him wrong, I immediately felt better.

Once I stopped feeling sorry for myself, I realized when he said five years, last year, he wasn't completely sure. This time, when he said five years, he said it decisively. And he



The PSA Test

Prostate-specific antigen (PSA) is a protein produced by prostate gland cells. A PSA test measures the level of this protein in the blood. When cancer or other disease is present, the level of this protein often rises. Because the body produces PSA, and its level is affected by the presence of disease, it is sometimes called a biological marker, or tumor marker.

A PSA value like 0.06 is a measurement of the amount of prostate specific antigen, in nanograms, present per milliliter (ng/mL) of blood; 0.06 is a fairly low measure.

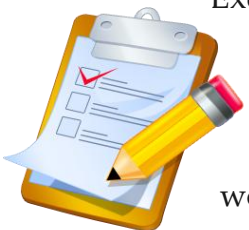
"In the past, most doctors considered a PSA level below 4.0 ng/mL as normal." (National Cancer Institute, 2009)

repeated what he said eight months ago when my PSA dropped to 0.09, that there still was a chance that my surgery and radiation had cured me. This realization also helped me feel better.



Feeling better, I decided to check into prostate cancer research, something I hadn't done in months, to see if any new drugs

were being tested. I came across an article on Mayo Clinic's Web site about a drug called *ipilimumab*. The information on ipilimumab is almost too good to be true. If I interpreted the information in the article right, ipilimumab will cure most prostate cancer patients, including me, if it successfully passes the clinical trials (Mayo Clinic, 2009).

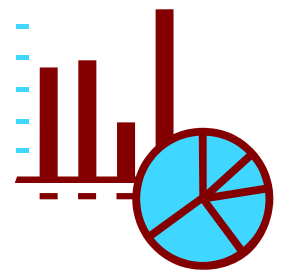


Excited, I filled out a request to be involved in a clinical trial on Mayo's Web site and submitted it. The next morning when I woke up, I had a message from Mayo Clinic.

I returned the call and to make a long story short: The clinical trial on the drug, ipilimumab, was no longer being held at the Mayo Clinic. However, I was told a lady who works with two researchers who are conducting clinical trials with ipilimumab was going to contact me with information on clinical trials being conducted around the nation. It was a long shot, but I might be able to participate in one of those trials. Talk about having my spirits lifted. When the lady did call, she asked me dozens of questions.

Again, long story short, she said my condition was not severe enough to participate in the clinical trials that involve the drug, ipilimumab, which, in a way, was good news. What she did say was they wanted to run some tests on me if I was agreeable. On April 20th and 21st, 2010, I will have spent a day at Mayo Clinic undergoing tests.

The statistics may indicate I have five more years. The doctor may say I have five more years. But you know what? After reading about the drug, ipilimumab, and its potential, plus having made an appointment at THE Mayo Clinic, I "just know" I will beat those odds.



A year and two months ago, the doctor told me I might have five years left to live. I didn't believe him. I went home and arrogantly promised my children I would live at least ten more years. Now I say even more arrogantly, "Ten years? Hell, I will die of old age!"



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