

## LYLE'S LAWS

# Lyle's Law of Courage

**M**Y FAMILY had chartered a party boat in the Florida Keys, complete with captain and crew, food, drink, and snorkeling gear. Our snorkeling experience started in a shallow bay where we all got wet and practiced swimming around with our faces underwater, a decidedly unnatural activity. The captain then got underway and headed offshore to a spot in the Florida Straits, several miles from land. Here, he tied the boat to a mooring buoy and told us to get back into our snorkeling gear. We were at the reef.

Well, it looked like just so much ocean to me, but he insisted the reef was just ahead of us. All we had to do was swim about 100 yards to the east and we would have some great snorkeling. We put on our masks and fins and milled about a bit, and a few of us got into the water and headed eastward. As I was waiting my turn at the ladder, one of the family aquanauts came over and said to me, very quietly, "I'm just terrified." All I could say before I started to descend was, "To tell the truth, so am I."

Once in the water, I swam to the east (I guess) and sure enough, there was the reef, with fish of all shapes and colors and a rainbow of coral fans and horns and branches. I raised my head and looked about, and there was the reluctant one right out with the rest of us—brave, to be sure, but still not without fear. Being brave allowed her to have an exhilarating experience in and on the water. Being afraid led her to do so with a healthy amount of caution.

Standing there on the deck, it would have been easy to say, "Oh, don't be afraid." At least it would have been easy if I had not had a measure of fear myself. But it would have been the wrong message, because fear, it turns out, is a great ally. Courage helps you succeed. Fear helps you stay alive. Let's take a look at **Lyle's Law of Courage**: *Be brave, but don't be fearless.*

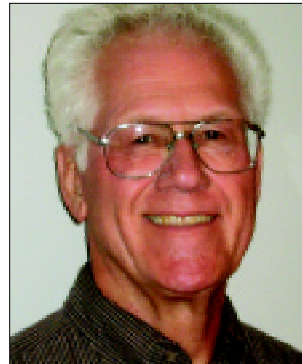
I think there is a lot of misunderstanding, or at least linguistic imprecision, about being fearless. We have all heard reference to "our fearless leader." It is a great compliment to be called fearless, and this appellation is intended to inspire confidence in the leader's ability to take us to wonderful places and to help us achieve great things. But do you really want a leader who knows no fear? When hiking through the mountains, might it not be best to have a leader who is afraid of falling off cliffs and hence helps us avoid that unpleasant eventuality? It might also be nice to have one who is afraid of being bitten by a rattlesnake and who will lead us around, rather

than through, the rattlesnake den.

There is an adage among seafarers that says, "A sailor who is not afraid of the sea will soon be drowned." Good advice. You'd better be afraid of "the old gray widowmaker" because if you aren't, she will kill you. But does that mean you never go to sea? Of course not. There are two basic issues: is there reason to be afraid, and, if you are afraid, how do you deal with it?

First we have to recognize that fear is rational and reasonable only if there are valid reasons to be afraid. We can dream up all kinds of dangers if we walk in the dark, but if we shine some light on our surroundings, we can

often see that the dangers are really not there. There is good reason to be afraid of the sea, but many of our fears are unfounded and, with a bit of examination, can be eliminated or at least diminished.



*Be brave,  
but  
don't be  
fearless.*

But what if your objective analysis leads to the conclusion that yes, there are good reasons to be afraid? What do you do about it? When Franklin D. Roosevelt assumed the presidency in the darkest days of the Great Depression, he said "... the only thing we have to fear is fear itself." I don't think he was telling the people not to be afraid. He was

telling them to cast out "nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror" and then to deal with their very real and justified fears and to be courageous in the face of those fears. Indeed, the case can be made that one can be brave only if one is afraid. Bravery is not the absence or the abolition of fear; it is the ability to do the things you are afraid of doing or to go to the places you are afraid of going. To get anywhere, we need to summon the courage to act in spite of our fears.

So far most of my examples have been of fear of physical dangers that we might face. But we also have fears that are not so physical in nature—those fears that we encounter in our professional and our personal lives. They are no less real.

Consider, for instance, the fear of failure. Is this a rational fear? I wish I could say that it is not, but I can't. Whenever you begin a new undertaking, there is a real possibility that it might not succeed. Any number of things can go wrong. Some will be under your control; some will not. Let's face it. You can fail. This is no time to be fearless. Your fear of failure should now inspire you to give the undertaking, whether it is a new job or a design project or a personal relationship, some careful scrutiny. Do a thorough analysis to identify those things that can cause failure, and then do what you can to minimize that eventuality. You may find that there is really not so much to be afraid of after all.

On the other hand, you may well find that there are lots of reasons to be frightened. Now is the time to summon your courage: To decide that even if your worst fears are realized, it won't be so bad; To decide that the potential rewards outweigh the possible costs; To decide that, no matter what, this is the right thing to do. In other words, to be brave, but not to be fearless.

James Norman Hall, co-author of *Mutiny on the Bounty*, wrote this poem

### Fear

*The thing that numbs the heart is this:  
That men cannot devise  
Some scheme of life to banish fear  
That lurks in most men's eyes.*

Dare I add a verse of my own?

### Addendum to Fear

*Men's eyes could lose that lurking blight  
If we could banish fear,  
But taming fears that still exist  
Can also make eyes clear.*

There. I have overcome my fear of being judged a lousy poet.

—Lyle D. Feisel, Ph.D., P.E., Iowa Alpha '61

## SEEKING DISTINGUISHED ALUMNUS NOMINEES

THE DISTINGUISHED ALUMNUS AWARD recognizes members who have continued to live up to the ideals of Tau Beta Pi as stated in our Eligibility Code and to foster a spirit of liberal culture throughout their lives after their college years. Their personal qualities of excellence and leadership serve as examples to collegiate members so as to influence their professional careers and personal lives.

Honored alumni have made exceptional efforts to demonstrate our ideals and to foster a spirit of liberal culture on local, national, and international scales. They have demonstrated integrity, breadth of interest, adaptability, and unselfish activity.

Future awardees will be chosen by a committee of national officers and invited to the Convention where they will each receive a special plaque, and their achievements will be recognized. A \$2,000 Tau Beta Pi Scholarship will be named in honor of each Distinguished Alumnus.

Nominations are requested from any individual member or any chapter, which may nominate any alumnus member

or members, except a national official, for the award. There is no limit on the number of nominations. The following documentation in four sets must be sent to the Executive Director by March 15:

1. A one-page nomination form of biographical information and a summary of the achievements and/or contributions of the nominee exemplifying the objective of the award. (President's Book, C 32-33.)
2. A citation (one-page limit) appropriate for presentation, documenting the nominee's outstanding adherence to the Tau Beta Pi ideal of *fostering a spirit of liberal culture* in our society. It may be written by the nominating party.
3. Two letters of reference from persons, excluding the nominator(s) or sponsoring chapter president, knowledgeable about the nominee's contributions and achievements.

---

### CHANGE OF ADDRESS / THE BENT

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Chapter \_\_\_\_\_ Class \_\_\_\_\_

New Address \_\_\_\_\_ Effective date of new address: \_\_\_\_\_

New City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email to: [addresschange@tbp.org](mailto:addresschange@tbp.org)

Or complete this form and mail to:

Tau Beta Pi / P.O. Box 2697 / Knoxville, TN 37901-2697

*Affix mailing label here if available.*