

Audio Transcription

Season /Episode #:	Season 4 Episode 6
Guest:	Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith
Title:	Rising to the Occasion: Consultant Lessons from Courage with Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith

Dr. Shari Dade	You are now listening to the Audacity to Fail podcast, a podcast about misstepping into success. Get ready to dive into conversation and real stories from leaders as they share how failure activates. The growth mindset is an important part of learning and motivation for improvement. I'm your host, doctor Shari Dade, psychologist with the National Center for Organizational Development.
Dr. Shari Dade	Thank you for tuning in. Let's get started.
Announcer	Support for this leadership podcast comes from the National Center for Organization Development. NCOD aims to increase the long term growth and performance of the Department of Veterans Affairs by collaboratively working with the leaders throughout the VA to improve organizational outcomes by supporting the development of an engaged workforce for additional information on our services. Click the link in the show notes.
Dr. Shari Dade	Leadership is often defined by the choices we make when the rubber meets the road. One of the calls that we have as leaders is to say yes in moments of challenge and moments of pressure, when the simplest option is to step back or give in. True leaders often find the strength and resilience to stand firm, inspire their teams, and drive through challenges.
Dr. Shari Dade	But how do they do it? What qualities enable some to push through while others might falter? As we dive into these questions, I am delighted to be joined by fellow consultant, psychologist and an all around extraordinary person, Doctor Courtney Barrett-Smith . Doctor Barrett-Smith is a supervisory senior organization development psychologist and leads the systems and analytics team at the National Center for Organization Development.
Dr. Shari Dade	So get ready to join us as we explore the journey of mis stepping into success, and as we uncover strategies that can help any leader rise to the occasion, even when it seems easier to yield. This is the audacity to Fail podcast season four, episode six rising to the occasion. Consultant. Lessons about courage. Hi there Courtney.

Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	Hi Shari, good to see you.
Dr. Shari Dade	It's great to have you here on today's episode. How are you doing on your end?
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	Doing wonderful.
Dr. Shari Dade	Yeah, that is good to hear. I am particularly excited about today's episode, because I have had the pleasure of knowing and working directly with you over the past four years, and I'm just excited for the listeners to get to know even just a snippet of of you and some of the things that you bring into our enterprise. So are you ready to hop in?
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	I am ready.
Dr. Shari Dade	All right. So one thing I'm going to say, Courtney, is over the past four years and early in those four years, it became really apparent to me that you have what I call a special mindset, or like an understanding of the value of running into or toward kind of big challenges when others may choose to run the other way.
Dr. Shari Dade	And it's something I truly appreciate about you, because it really is a special skill set, because it takes quite a bit of courage. It takes quite a bit of steadfastness. And so for you, when you think about that, where does that stem from for you?
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	Yeah. Well, I appreciate that about the special mindset. I like the way you're framing that. Thank you for that. Yeah, I think a lot of it probably comes from when I think about kind of where I feel like my roots are and where I feel like I've witnessed been a part of done, well done that. Well, a lot of that I think has come from I started in the community doing work in the community and then came through Department of Corrections and Detention and one of the things that I learned pretty fast is that, like even small changes affect bigger systems.
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	And so, yeah, when I witnessed people in what was going on in their world and seeing how things are not always representative of what I think they could be, I felt like I really just wanted to be part of that change. I remember seeing something a long time ago that was about like a butterfly effect. I guess a butterfly changes its wings or flaps its wings.

Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	You can feel the effect on the other side of the world.
Dr. Shari Dade	And for sure.
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	Metaphorically, that's always really resonated with me.
Dr. Shari Dade	You know the saying, be the change you want to see.
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	Thing where you got it. Sure. Speaking. That's right.
Dr. Shari Dade	Yeah. So the ability to like, really enact that day to day. And I appreciate the point that you brought up around like it happens when we think about really big change. But even like the small flutter of the butterfly wing, it doesn't have to be this massive amount of change or this massive challenge. It could be the smallest thing that we we move forward in.
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	Yeah, yeah, coming up in a space with a lot of difference. And then as I got into the workforce, that difference was magnified in just a different way. I think, particularly around just my place of privilege and how I experienced that and how I saw that exercise like or not in others. And I think the courage had really come out from trying to use the privilege to help create space for other people, but even more importantly, to get out of the way and to be courageous enough to be able to get out of the way so people can do their thing too, without needing my assistance.
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	But just really, they just needed the space or the platform to do it, for sure.
Dr. Shari Dade	When you think about leadership and like I said, the courageousness that it takes to run into challenges, how do you define courage in the context of leadership?
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	I think for me, like and even kind of getting ready for this and preparing for this, I thought to myself, like, do I need to? Should I be giving, a formal definition or quoting someone who's done all the work right around courage? And it was actually a good process for me to think about, because I think it reflects sometimes the courage it takes to just use your voice in the way that kind of comes from your heart and mind.

Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	And so I think how I would really define it for myself and how I try to work with clients is from a space of being able to take action, even when it's hard, even when it's uncomfortable. Even sometimes when it hurts, or even when it's messy or messier than we would want it to be.
Dr. Shari Dade	The courage to use your voice. I think that's really, really big to think about. Yeah, especially for me, because admittedly, I'd like to be at times too polished to like, oh, let me think about it. Let me pause before I dive in. And I think, you know, a certain amount of that is important. But to the extent of like hesitating and missing opportunities are missing things, I think that's when it can be really difficult.
Dr. Shari Dade	And so I appreciate this idea of like just having the courage to use your voice and that being an action right at times, that being the action that actually will allow for there to be this movement forward. So yeah, I appreciate that. And I think it might resonate with a lot of leaders who are thinking about like, what does this even look like?
Dr. Shari Dade	How do I even start to think about how to be that type of kind of courageous leader? And so I think that's an essential part, essential quality to think about.
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	Yeah, certainly I think it's it's often hard sometimes because even like in what I was doing right, is just trying to think about like sometimes the focus becomes what other people think versus like, you know, where am I at? And what can I speak from? And if I'm in this heart and mind space and in this space of, being able to put some words to some of that, I think some of that just helps with identifying, is this going to be worth it for me?
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	What's the personal why here? How do I speak to that, in addition to all the business cases that we always are kind of holding in the back, I think.
Dr. Shari Dade	Yeah, yeah. Because I think we can always come up with the business case, but that personal way is really what tends to like hold this in, allow for us to to hang on when things are difficult and when, when it becomes more challenging than we may have thought or may have hoped. You know, that personal way is the thing that that keeps us on our journey, keeps, keeps our feet planted at times.
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	Yeah.

Dr. Shari Dade	I know one of the themes that we've heard as consultants from leaders in our current climate is they've been grappling with this idea of navigating uncertainty and making decisions when the future is not defined. And when you think about that current state, why is courage an essential quality for leaders, especially when there's uncertainty or when there's crisis happening?
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	Yeah, I think because leadership is really hard. A lot of the times you and, sometimes I think that if we're able to kind of do the hard things and leaders can feel like even this small change is a win, even if I can, you know, speak my truth on this. This is a win. and being able to hold space and hold room for what's happening now and trying to sit in a space of even if I don't know, even if I'm unclear or I'm uncomfortable, you know, what is it that I can do and get in and trying to lead into that, that action space rather than kind of sitting, you know, and
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	sitting and in for everybody. I think it looks different. I don't I don't think that it's it's going to be the same for everyone. what I find as helpful in consultation is just even giving people the space to sit next to them in the discomfort. Yeah. And hold the space for that so that whatever it is, like they're not walking alone in that.
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	And I think that lets people find their voice because they can feel like supported in kind of moving through the discomfort or the messy or the fill in the blank, depending on the day. they can they can walk on. I can walk with them in there. Yeah.
Dr. Shari Dade	Yeah. I think that's really powerful because leadership in itself can feel lonely. It can feel pretty singular. And in moments of discomfort, I think that becomes magnified. Right. It's like, nobody truly knows what I'm dealing with or nobody understands. And all the things we tell ourselves when we're kind of in the depths of loneliness or feeling singular, and to have someone say, okay, I'm going to sit beside you in that and be able to just be another person sitting there while you grapple with some of these things.
Dr. Shari Dade	I think that is really powerful. And as a consultant too, I've seen that really help leaders steady themselves to not feel like, all right, I need to make a move right now, but to really just sit in it and say, all right, like, how am I going to show up in X? Very hard questions around what type of leader do I want to be?
Dr. Shari Dade	How do I want to show up in this situation? What does that look like for

	myself, and what does that look like for my team into? Then grasp on to the courage that it takes to then move out of that space. And so I think that's so powerful.
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	Yeah. No, I agree with that because I think sometimes just sitting in it lets you feel like there's more choices there than, than just feeling like you're kind of isolated into a place of you don't have a choice or, you know, you're you're focused maybe on one choice versus some of the other things you might be able to find if you're given time, space and support, which I think is kind of part of the consultation space, something my dad used to tell me, we used to run a lot when I was a kid and, growing up, he is incredibly fast, even at his, even as his as he was aging.
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	He is like incredibly fast still. So, one of the things he used to say is like when things would get hard, like in the run and we'd be kind of halfway there and I would get tired or aching or anything. He would always say, like, find your second win. Yeah. Which really. Right. The translation is connected to like mentally and physically.
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	Like, what else? What else do we need to do in order to kind of get to the to the end of this or to the goal of this? And I think about that a lot in consultation of like, how do we help people find their second wind amidst all of the things that can be really challenging for sure.
Dr. Shari Dade	No, I, I love that. I feel like I say I love that in every episode, but I love that when we talk about slowing down to speed up so often, and it really does give that ability to find that second wind, to be able to sit in, to say what are truly all of the choices I have in this situation.
Dr. Shari Dade	And when thinking about courage, I often think about whether courage is something that people are kind of born with or something that we learn over time. Right. And I think in that space of finding the second, when we then can start to develop that space of courage, you know, we can then start to say, like, let me hone in on this and lean into courage or learn lean into being a courageous leader.
Dr. Shari Dade	And sometimes that can be really scary. But I do think that ability to get your second wind makes it a little less scary at times. You know, you have the breath to finish. Yeah. So that's a great analogy.
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	Yeah. No, certainly. And I think the the wind like finding finding what it is for you that's going to kind of carry you in that. For me it's been oftentimes like having other people in my circle who can remind me of

	that. Like my dad's voice echoing that. And then, other folks in the circle that also can help, you know, reaffirm that whatever is needed for that, that I, I'm going to reach out and get active around making sure I keep kind of my courageous, cup filled, so to speak, rather than running on a deficit.
Dr. Shari Dade	Yeah, it's very similar, like when you have someone running beside you, when you have someone sitting with you in moments of discomfort, even if they don't say a thing. Right? Even if they are like, I'm all out of resources to give, you know, just having that other person there allows for there to be this moment of like, mustering up the guts to keep moving, right, and mustering up that power.
Dr. Shari Dade	And so I know how many episodes we've talked about for leaders, the importance of having a coach or a consultant or a mentor or someone that can say, get your second wind, it's in you. I know it's there. How powerful that is along the journey, when you think about yourself as what I would define, I'm giving you the title of courageous Leader.
Dr. Shari Dade	But the thing that I would define when you think about that, or who have been the people or what have been the resources that helped you kind of gain that second wind along the way?
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	Yeah, I definitely would echo like the coaching. I certainly that always I think has been a great resource professionally. And I think for me, like the thing I identified, I think early on is being able to think about people often talk about balance, and I shift it for myself into a place of thinking about holding family in the space for me as as I've got two little kids at home, and sometimes it feels like trying to want to give 100% to them and give 100% to work.
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	And trying to think about, being pulled on days when kids don't always sleep through the night. Imagine that. And yeah, and daycare bugs of the week, whatever, whatever is kind of going on and wanting to be so present for them and then wanting to also dedicate and give everything I can to clients and coworkers and things. I think for me, it's been recognizing and reframing for myself that the 100% just can't be in both spaces at all.
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	The time. And as much as my heart wants to give, sometimes I have to be able to. And it's been a work in progress. I'm going to say I don't have this figure it out. But for, I will say that I actively work on trying to make sure that I give myself grace around. Like if I'm not hitting 100%, that's okay.

Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	Being able to say no. Being able to say yes. Yeah. Being able to like, pause for a minute on that second wind, take a moment to figure out, is this what I need for my second wind? Is this going to protect my peace, or is this going to be something that isn't going to be quite aligned with what's what I'm hoping to do?
Dr. Shari Dade	Yeah, absolutely. The idea around finding your piece and then asking that question like, is this going to be something that helps me to have the ability to do that? Has it always been your inclination to ask yourself some of those questions when there's this pull to kind of run into the challenges? I run into some of the things that may be difficult for folks to withstand.
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	No, like I absolutely answer, I am the person who has 25 windows open on their computer. that and that is essentially where I like I'm moving. You want if you want to. You need my help. I got you right. You. I'm doing ten things at the school. Yep, I got you right. I'm trying to work out I got you so all of the things.
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	No, I think it's something that. I think it's a great question because it's something that I have to pause on. And I actually have put reminders, like in my calendar to like, kind of reassess weeks at a time of what is it that I am, like, focused on this week? What am I hoping to get out of this week and try to hold on to?
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	Like, what is it that I'm trying to get done, what are my priorities, and trying to revisit that routinely? And also something I haven't always been great at is then reaching out to say, hey, I'm working on this. Is this something that we can do that either one like, yes, I want to be a part of or no, that's another thing.
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	I'm like, no, I cannot be a part of this because of A, B and C and not feeling so bad about that, because in some ways I won't be able to give them kind of what I can offer if I'm if I'm stretched too thin. Yeah.
Dr. Shari Dade	I think that's so important because sometimes we can in a burden, send the message that in order to be an effective leader, you have to be running face forward into everything at all times. Kind of like that movie everywhere. Everything all at once. Right? And the truth of the matter is the intentionality that comes along with being courageous.

Dr. Shari Dade	Right? Because it's not always I'm courageous if I say yes to everything or if I run directly into every fire, sometimes it is that ability to say like, oh, this is not going to allow me to still have time for my family or still have the ability to do some of these other things that I want to do five months from now.
Dr. Shari Dade	And I think for leaders to be able to walk in in that intention is hard at times. So it's good to hear, like some of the strategies that you've put into play, especially knowing that that hasn't always been you. Right? So some of the strategies around like putting things on the calendar, having checking ins, having conversations with yourself around some of those hard things around.
Dr. Shari Dade	Yes. No. Should I now should I later that type of thing?
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	Definitely. Because I think part of where I've at least put some worked into is around like the courage to show up for myself rather than so much external facing or kind of what else am I doing and trying to particularly like in coming into parenthood. It's really resonated with me because so much goes has gone just carrying the baby and then everything else after that, all of that has been trying to then make sure that I'm also having the courage to just show up for me and to create space around that and that that's okay to do that in a different way, even if it look different.
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	Ten years ago than it looked. Now that that's ever evolving on how I do that and the way I felt like I was courageous ten years ago in the way I do it now looks different. And that's all right, because part of that is just me growing, and part of that is me giving myself permission in different ways.
Dr. Shari Dade	Yeah, no, I think it taps into this piece that the reality of courageousness or rising to any challenge is that sometimes it comes with like a side of risk, whether it be personal or organizational. And we have to be intentional about thinking about what those risks might be. Right? So if I run headfirst into this today, how is that going to impact me tomorrow?
Dr. Shari Dade	How is that going to impact my team tomorrow? When you think about some of the risks that might show up, what are some of those things that folks can be on the lookout for or be aware of?
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	Yeah, I think with risk, a lot of it. Like there's the personal risk, right. So, you know, what does this mean for me? And and is this going to be

	something that is going to compromise relationship capital. Is it going to be something that is going to risk, like how I move in the organization. Is it going to risk like, does this person still want to reach out to me if I don't give them the feedback they're looking for?
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	Or, you know, some of the things that I think make the workspace just enhance what's going on. I think also the place around how we kind of connect with others, even like in folks that are in positions higher than us, how that's going to be received, how they're going to view us just in terms of our reputation and or just our credibility around things.
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	I think it shows up in a few different ways, even if it's not something that we know is going to happen. I think just the anticipation of any of those things, and even more probably, is a is, I think sometimes the place where we can get halted or we get.
Dr. Shari Dade	Frozen, yeah, where we can get frozen. And I think it is so important to analyze. Right. So in that moment of slowing down before we speed up, but to analyze what are the risk, right. What are the personal risks, what are the organizational or team risk. And then allowing for that analysis to not just freeze us. Right. And that kind of get the paralysis that comes along sometimes with that, but allowing for it to help motivate that.
Dr. Shari Dade	Our decision to be able to say, okay, this is going to be the space where I want to run directly, face forward into or having the courage to say, no, this isn't the space that we, me, our team is able to push some of our energy or bandwidth, and that's easier said than done thing right. When you make that decision.
Dr. Shari Dade	But I think the courageous leader often takes the time to analyze those reasons, to be able to think about them.
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	I agree, I agree, and I think in that when you're kind of connected to, is this going to be something that is kind of what's in it for you? Right. Like, what's the worth of that for you to take the risk? And ten years ago, right. I came in to this kind of work. I was in grad school full time.
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	I was working full time. Right. I was doing all of these things with a lot of risk for something to drop, because there was so much going on. And at that time, I feel like it was the risk. I wasn't analyzing or pausing as much to kind of think about, is this what could really like? What would be the risk of this?

Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	I just kind of put my head down and kept running. Right. And, but I think what I've kind of learned and tried to think about was with those risks, it's worth it to me, because and that's I try to like frame things around that. Like what? Why is this worth it? Or why is this not and and reaffirm that I often like right.
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	Like if there's something really important to me that I want to, like, hold on to, I just write it on a post-it, stick it on my computer. That way it's in my mind. It's like an affirmation for where I'm trying to get to.
Dr. Shari Dade	Yeah, I like the the point around, is it worth it for me? Because it's going to be different for everyone. And I think being able to take a moment to analyze that, to ask that question, to think through it, is it worth it for me? Is it worth it for my team? Like all of these different things for leaders, it helps allow for a little bit of direction in uncertainty, a little bit of direction when it comes to unknowns.
Dr. Shari Dade	The worth, the value, the purpose. Give some direction there.
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	I agree, I agree, I love that.
Dr. Shari Dade	So finally we're almost at the end here. Good time has flown by. But finally, what advice would you give leaders as a consultant who want to learn how to lead more courageously?
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	Yeah, I think the first thing I would say is, maybe I could give a caveat before I give. Yes, give a story.
Dr. Shari Dade	I love a.
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	Good.
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	What I would say is that being courageous, like, isn't something that has to show up in full throttle. or it could, it can.
Dr. Shari Dade	I love that it doesn't have to be in full throttle, because I remember when you and maybe like the first year of working together, we had a conversation and I said, I love how hot you burn for certain topics, but I am afraid that because you burn so hot, you'll burn out so quickly.

Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	You did, you know.
Dr. Shari Dade	And so just this idea of now where you are of saying like, oh yeah, I understand it doesn't have to be full throttle, and I'm still courageous and I'm still doing the things and it's still working out in a way that I'm still showing up how I want to show up. You know, I think that's that's beautiful.
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	You know, certainly. I mean, I think that's so true because I think the full throttle is where I've been in the past. And I'm not saying I don't push it all because I do believe it is real. And that's right. It is real. It is real. And I, I do do that and I'm okay with that. Like, but I also am aware that sometimes when I have gone full throttle, it does get to the point of like feeling burnt out or feeling like I feel just like heartache about things that I just can't let go of.
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	Particularly because some things, just like when they resonate across like all aspects of my world, the heartache just doesn't stop when I'm off of work. And so some of those things that I go full throttle on are they continue outside of work. And so I, I feel it in a different way. I experience it in a different way.
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	And I think leaders have that too, you know, depending on the topic, depending on what's happening, things just don't stop. Right? And they say like often I remember in my career I've heard like, we'll leave, you know, personal at the door and, and I don't really I don't really buy that. I don't do.
Dr. Shari Dade	That.
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	Layer. How do you do that? Right. You're aware of it and you make choices around it I think is what what we try to do. But I think what I've tried to do too, with the throttling is just try to like modulate a little bit. So I think if I was going to give encouragement, empowerment is what I would hope to do.
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	I I'm not sure I'm in a place of advice, but I will. I will follow and certainly I would want for leaders to know that the throttling is going to look different, right? And like things that you believe in, go hard ahead. There's a there's a quote around like you miss 100% of the shots you don't take.

Dr. Shari Dade	Every single time.
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	Absolutely. So if you don't try to get out there, whatever it is for you, things won't change or the way that we want them to. So I think if I could empower, leave that with folks to be able to say, like, even if it doesn't land exactly where you want it to, the fact that you tried it is worth the win.
Dr. Shari Dade	Absolutely. That's wonderful. Well, before we head out, I always like to play a game of word association. So I've got a few words, few phrases here that I want to throw at you, and I'd love to hear just your thoughts on those. Okay. Okay. All right. So the first one we've used this a lot throughout the episode. It's courageous leadership.
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	Me others VA.
Dr. Shari Dade	Absolutely I love that. Yes. the next one would be risk management in leadership.
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	Be courageous.
Dr. Shari Dade	Yeah, yeah. When you're thinking about those risks yeah right.
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	Be intentional.
Dr. Shari Dade	Be intentional for sure.
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	Use your throttle.
Dr. Shari Dade	Use your throttle. Now that I always say that that could be a t shirt, right. Use your throttle.
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	Use your throttle. Find your second one.
Dr. Shari Dade	Find your second wind. Absolutely. And then lastly audacity to fail.
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	Remarkable. Empowering. Nice courageous.

Dr. Shari Dade	Yeah. Courageous for sure for sure. Oh Courtney I am as always immensely grateful for the way that you show up in our office. on my team, just as a coworker, as a friend. And so I am grateful and thankful that you were here today to give some gems to our listeners. And just thank you so much for all that you do for our system.
Dr. Courtney Barrett-Smith	Thank you Shari. Bye bye.
Dr. Shari Dade	So we've come to the end of another great episode of The Audacity to Fail podcast. Thank you for tuning in to learn how missteps can lead to growth and success. Be sure to check out the key lessons in the show notes for a refresher. To request services from the National Center for Organization Development, check out our website also linked in the show notes.
Dr. Shari Dade	Remember, if you missed the target 100 times, you had not failed. Instead, you've simply found 100 strategies that did not work. Be well and continue to fail. Forward until next time. Thank you.