Bravery means different things to different people. Nelson Mandela once said, “I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear”.

Last week, TV presenter Phillip Schofield announced to Instagram and the viewers of This Morning, that he was gay. A statement that has, in his words, had taken him over 27 years to come to terms with. Undoubtedly, he has been in distress and turmoil over his sexuality for the majority of his adult life. And yet, it was the realization to him that in his daily interviews on This Morning with members of the public, he listens to them telling their own brave stories and it was this that pushed him to have the courage to deal with his own battle
Acting bravely generally makes us feel good because it involves mastering our emotions. The press and countless messages on social media have praised Phillip Schofield’s bravery. The fact that we celebrate bravery so much tells us that it is a very human activity. Bravery, in the sense of acting in a way that responds to risk appropriately, not over-confidently or in a cowardly way, will also help us to accomplish “good” things. No doubt Phillip Schofield’s public act of bravery will have prompted many people around the UK to take their own leap of faith and come out to their nearest and dearest.

We always think bravery is someone who’s not fearful, but it’s the opposite. We all feel frightened of something – bravery is getting over and overcoming that fear to do something anyway.

Bravery is about being ok with tolerating uncertainty. Changes – whether big or small – can throw you off and leave you feeling unbalanced, but if you deal with that uncertainty and go for it even when you’re not sure what’s going to happen, that’s bravery.

It’s also about acknowledging or accepting how you’re feeling; especially if they’re feelings you’re not particularly comfortable with, just like Phillip Schofield was experiencing.

During their This Morning interview, when Holly asked Phillip how he felt now that the news was “out there”, he answered, “I feel lighter”. Being brave and overcoming this obstacle in his life has been an important step in helping him live a happier life.

The celebration of bravery as an end in itself is seen in the celebration of Robert Falcon Scott, a man who not only failed in his mission to get to the South Pole first but died on the way back, along with three of his team. Spectacular failure, but unmistakable courage and bravery: he (and they) knew the risks, yet chose to go ahead with their expedition anyway.

So, it’s ok to feel frightened, but it’s what you do with that fear that’s really important. That’s what will open up more opportunities in our lives. I have a deep fear of flying, but somehow the promise of sunnier climates, different cultures and escapism, lets me find that inner
strength to force myself on a plane and confront that terror!

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