



WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO SPEAK UP?

PREP FOR THE SESSION

Overview

This resource explores the issue of **Cancel Culture** through the value of **Courage**.

At-a-Glance:

This resource presses learners to think about what it takes to speak up and with courage in a climate where people are frequently cancelled for having a dissenting point of view. It is built upon real life experiences of self-censorship, and asks learners to think of their own similar experiences and how they respond. It brings cotemporary voices in conversation with a classical Jewish text as it brings learners on a path of exploring the concept of courage. The exercise contained below offers an opportunity to think about what one might need in order to be courageous, and also why acting with courage might also be hard.



Time Estimate:

40 minutes



Materials Needed:

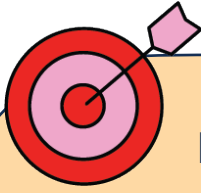
- Print out of “[Courage to Act](#)” activity sheet (or digital version to write on)
- Blank paper for creating a “Courage Card”



Best Uses:

- For a chance for individualized reflection on challenging moments
- As an opportunity to write about the value of courage from a personal vantage point
- When cancel culture event is in the news, this is a way to enter the conversation

LET'S GET STARTED



FRAME THE ISSUE

*To frame our exploration, scan the QR code or [click here](#) to watch the *Values in Action* video on *Cancel Culture* and respond to the prompt below:*



- In your own words, explain the two sides to the debate on cancel culture – the positives and negatives - as they are expressed in the video.

Read for framing:

On one side of the debate viewed in the video above, the culture of call out and cancelling has helped to bring justice, particularly in cases where there is a power imbalance. At the same time, however, it has created an environment where those with dissenting or different opinions feel uncomfortable or even unsafe sharing their views.

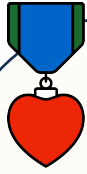
Facilitator reads the following data point and asks the group to react.

More than 60 percent of Americans admitted in 2020 that they have views they are afraid to share in public, and another 32 percent fear that their job prospects could be harmed by speaking their mind.

- Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you've self-censored for fear of being cancelled? Please share.

7 min





EXPLORE THE VALUE: COURAGE

Facilitator reads:

Have you ever been in a circumstance where you were listening to others (formal or informal settings), heard something that bothered you, or that you needed to stand up for, and thought to yourself “I want to speak up, but I am worried about the consequences”? Or have you ever found yourself thinking, “How do I speak up when the risks are high?”

Using the value of courage as a guide can offer us a way to lean into the safety and risk assessment that is at the heart of these questions.

Courage is the ability to do something difficult even when there's risk. Courageous people do and say what they think is right despite opposition. Courage is something that can be built, and exercising it takes practice. But it's hard to always act upon. And there may be times where taking the safer route feels more appropriate.



Facilitator prompts the group:

- When was the last time you did something courageous? What was it?

6 min





ANCHOR IN JEWISH WISDOM

Read the following excerpt to anchor our exploration in Jewish wisdom:

The Mishna in Pirkei Avot (2nd century legal a compilation of the ethical teachings and from Rabbinic Jewish tradition) Chapter 2, Mishna 5 states:

בְּמָקוֹם שֶׁאֵין אָנָשִׁים, הַשְׁתַּדֵּל לִהְיוֹת אִישׁ

“B'makom shein anashim hishtadel lihiyot ish”

“In a place where there are no people, you must strive to be a person.”



Facilitator prompts the group:

- What do you think the Mishna means when it refers to “a place where there are no people”?
- Why does the Mishna have to specify that you “must strive to be a person?” What does it mean “to be a person?” What might hold one back from “being a person”?

Continue reading with the group:

This Mishna encourages us to think about what it means to be courageous.

Building upon this Mishna, and developing what it means to be courageous, Rabbi Sharon Cohen Anisfeld, President of Hebrew College, writes:

Have participants read the following in pairs and consider the questions below:

“...But what does courage look like? I’m afraid we have fallen into false and easy formulas, in which courage is measured by the number of Facebook posts we have circulated or the number of petitions we have signed. I am even more concerned that we have convinced ourselves that walking away from relationships with people who disagree with us on important issues of the day is a show of courage, and that staying in relationship—staying in conversation even when our differences are confusing or painful—is a sign of cowardice or moral compromise.

6 min





More and more, I am coming to feel that the opposite is true. I want to summon within myself, and I want to elicit from others, the courage to stick it out when we find ourselves deeply challenged by someone else's perspective. I want to do so precisely because I know—however hard it is for me to hold onto this knowledge—that my own perspective is inherently partial, constrained by the limits of my experience, intellect, and emotion, constrained by the limits of my own life.”



Facilitator prompts the group:

- What is the tension that R. Anisfeld is getting at?
- How do her words relate to a climate of cancel culture?
- What is one key insight you now have about exercising courage after reading this excerpt?

10 min



ACTIVITY

Read the following as framing to the activity:

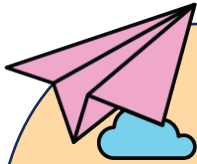
Sometimes we are ready for the situations that require us to be courageous. Other times, we may be caught off guard. The exercise below is an opportunity for us to think about what the courage to act entails for you, what you need in order to be courageous and why it might also be hard.

Facilitator distributes the activity sheet [linked here](#) and gives participants an opportunity (5-7 minutes) to fill it out individually. Then gather the group back together and divide into havrutas/pairs to compare responses.



Facilitator gathers the group and offers the opportunity for participants to share any of their answers.

7 min



PROMPT ACTION

MAKING COMMITMENTS TO BE COURAGEOUS:

Facilitator reads:

Now that we've had a chance to think generally about what it takes for us to act with courage, let's circle back to our topic of cancel culture. Speaking up when things feel safe, is easy. Speaking up when things are risky feels dangerous. Where is the middle ground where you can test yourself? What are the courage cards you need to hold in order to speak up in a culture of cancelation?

With a havruta/partner, and based on the activity above, respond to the following prompts:

1. Identify a moment that might arise in your life when you would want to stand up and speak out, but self-censor because of a climate of cancelation.
2. Challenge yourself to act with courage. How will you act with courage? What steps will you take?
3. What is one commitment you can make right not to allow yourself to lean into courage in the face of cancel culture even if there may be risks in doing so?

After a few minutes of havruta, invite the group back for sharing.



CLOSE WITH INTENTION

Facilitator reads:

In the exploration we just experienced, we took a contemporary issue – cancel culture and the feelings it might bring up – fear and self-censorship – and examined it through the lens of courage. It asked us to identify unique moments when we might need to act and exercise courage, and to think about why it might be hard for us to do so. It ended with a chance to take practical steps towards building our own capacities to act with courage in light of a culture where it might at times feel risky to do so.



Facilitator closes with a prompt:

- What is one new insight you have gained as a result of this conversation?

3 min

