

# COURAGE

IN THE BOARDROOM

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# Courage in the Boardroom

NATALIE RICHARDSON - PERFORMANCE FRONTIERS, 2018

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**“Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.”**

- Winston Churchill

Courage involves saying what needs to be said to the right person, at the right time, and in the right manner. As leaders we all know and observe things that others need to hear in order for our organisations to be successful. Often this is after something has gone wrong, when someone is having a negative impact or they are going off track. In these circumstances, many find it difficult to deliver hard messages, so many of us keep them to ourselves. Yet, for our organisations to survive and thrive we need the courage to speak up, surface issues and perhaps take some heat. Adding group dynamics to the situation often exacerbates the issue, as it is often easier to give feedback one to one.

**So how do we land a message in a fast-paced boardroom with competing agendas and tensions?**

Courage comes from knowing you are seeking a better outcome for your customers/clients, team, stakeholders and organisation. So, be clear of the reason you're speaking. Then be concise. Conversations move quickly and there is limited time and attention. A long preamble is likely to frustrate others, and even get you cut off before your key message is heard. Say your point directly and calmly, using constructive language. Stick to the facts. Start specific, state the issue or problem and consequences - then move to general points. Even if you have a lot to say, don't overwhelm the group, focus on landing the key point first, with no embellishment. If others lose their composure, or become aggressive, don't respond, just stick to your point. If your initial message is rejected or glossed over and you are convinced of its importance, just return to your

message. Keep in mind you are speaking up for the collective benefit of your organisation and since personal gain or vengeance is not at stake, you are coming from a place of strength.

Organisations are a complex matrix of issues, rivalries, and groups fuelled by egos, sensitivities and personal interest. Delivering negative messages in this environment, with maximum effect and minimum noise requires individuals to tread boldly but carefully. At times the conversation needs to be private to prevent threat responses. Cue the person on what you would like to talk about and ask permission to have the conversation e.g. "I have a concern over the way [issue, project, person etc] is being treated and I would like to talk to you about it if you have a moment?" Consider, but do not be discouraged by political considerations. Choose the right timing and setting, and if possible let the person pick the time and place.

Do you shy away from situations that require courage? Ask yourself 'why?' What's getting in your way? What are you most afraid of? Often people are concerned about damaging relationships, but we often do more damage by shying away from conflict as important issues go unresolved. Then we find ourselves in crisis mode, reacting rather than being proactive and everyone suffers. Ask yourself: What is the potential downside of delivering a message you think is needed and will help your organisation, even if it causes someone some short-term pain? What if you were the person affected, would you appreciate someone bringing the issue to your attention while it is still fixable? How would you feel if someone knew something and did not bring it to your attention, resulting in you spending inordinate amounts of time and resources to fix it?

Have courage in your convictions. Your organisation will ultimately benefit, as will its people.