

A VIEW FROM SUE UNERMAN

# Don't get mad, get brave

BEHAVIOUR CHANGE OPINION TRANSFORMATION

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## The bravery of the intransigent.

At the “Bravest” Marketing Society Conference in [November](#) Tesco Chair and CBI president John Allan explained his own interpretation of bravery at work. Commenting that risking unpopularity by disagreeing with the status quo didn't require the same bravery as the day job of a fire fighter he talked about his early experiences of standing up and being counted. In his first role as a junior brand manager it was business practice for the most senior people in the room to comment on work last. There was nowhere to hide and it wasn't possible to just agree with the highest paid person in the room.

John commented that he has learnt more from his failures than from his successes, something that is clearly true generally.

It is hard though to talk about failures. Its difficult to speak about detours and twists in the road, even wrong turnings, when so much business culture is about continuous fast improvement and showing no weakness to anyone.

That's why at our Glass Wall Network [event](#) recently we invited panellists to talk about times when they were up to their necks in hot water and how they got themselves out of it. The Glass Wall Network is open to everyone but is named for our [book](#) about diversity at work. As women are sometimes stereotypically characterised as less strong so we asked 3 extremely strong women to come and talk about how they became this way. Eleanor Roosevelt (American First Lady, not a panellist) once said "Women are like teabags, you don't know how strong they are until they are in hot water".

What's clear is that often strength comes from getting angry. Claudine Collins, MediaCom's Chief Client Officer, told us where her bravery in face of difficulties came from. She mentioned a time at her first job in media when she was shouted at by an irate boss for something she hadn't done. She told him, if he didn't stop shouting at her she'd walk out. He carried on shouting. She walked out. And didn't go back the next day. Didn't go back in fact until he'd apologised and properly listened to her demands for better behaviour.

As we wrote in The Glass Wall, Success strategies for women at work and businesses that mean business, anger can often be very nuanced for people. Some people are very worried about expressing their anger. It can make you unpopular. It can show that you are emotional. Bottling it up though is one of the worst things you can do in terms of generating unhelpful stress in the workplace. And faking forgiveness is bad for you too. A Harvard Medical School [study](#) followed more than eight hundred people over forty years and concluded that though it is important to stay in control when you stand your ground, that taking action about something that matters enough to you to make you furious will be better for you and for your career and actually I'd say for the business you work in too. Much better than simply sucking it up and swallowing the frustration.

Many people prefer to sit on their anger rather than find a way of expressing it. But anger is an energy and it can propel positive change. Continually swallowing your anger will sap

your strength and contribute to making your business slow to transform.

Use your anger to fuel bravery. Don't put up with unfairness, challenge the status quo and drive your career.

This article was published on Sue Unerman's [LinkedIn](#) and also appeared on [Marketing Society](#).

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