

A VIEW FROM SUE UNERMAN

Follow the Avengers: you need many voices for leadership

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SUE UNERMAN, CHIEF TRANSFORMATION OFFICER 31 JAN 2018

Much like Marvel's super heroes, a business needs many leadership voices to succeed, says our Chief Transformation Officer Sue Unerman.

Writer and leadership coach Amy Jen Su [wrote](#) in Harvard Business Review earlier this year that you need to cultivate many different leadership voices rather than simply focussing on trying to appear confident.

She lists five different voices that she says are essential for leadership:

- The voice of character, the persona that holds your convictions
- The voice of context, where you communicate perspective
- The voice of clarity that helps prioritise

- The voice of curiosity, where you are able to learn and admit too that you don't know all the answers
- The voice of connection, where you acknowledge the contribution of others

She says, "Discovering and developing your voice as a leader is the work of a lifetime."

Indeed it is, but it is also true that you don't actually need all those voices to be developed to the same extent.

It is honestly impossible for most people to be expert in every voice. If you are trying to be brilliant at character, context, clarity, curiosity and connection then you might be missing something. You might be missing the fact that on your team bench there is someone else who is supremely better at context or curiosity and your true role must be to allow them to take that aspect of leadership and run with it.

At MediaCom we like to talk about the team of experts [approach](#). One of our favourite [movies](#) is Avengers Assemble. The plot of this fine example of a Marvel cartoon converted to the big screen involves bringing together a crack team of superheroes with very different skills. Iron Man, the Hulk, Captain America, Hawkeye, Thor and Black Widow don't necessarily see eye to eye in every respect. They are diverse in values, behaviours and dress sense. Individually none of them can overcome the mega threat posed by Thor's evil brother Loki. Together however (spoiler alert) they are able to save the earth.

It is Nick Fury, leader of the peacekeeping organisation S.H.I.E.L.D., who assembles the difficult to manage but brilliant crew. It is Nick Fury's voice that is instrumental in holding the team together to focus on the task in hand.

He does this not by having multiple voices, but by being the consistent voice of focus throughout the chaos of the enemy attacks.

Now when I say Nick Fury, who is after all a fictional character, feel free to imagine Samuel

L Jackson, who has played the role both on the big screen and on TV. Jackson's persona is said to have informed the writing and characterisation, even before he was cast in the role.

Fury is straight and to the point. He won't take any nonsense from any of this team, no matter how talented: " 'I am Iron Man' – you think you're the only superhero Mr Stark, you're part of a bigger universe". He believes in this team, and tells them so: "I still believe in super heroes". Sometimes he goes his own way and breaks the rules for his team: "I recognise that the council has made a decision, but given it's a stupid ass decision I have decided to ignore it."

Don't worry about many voices. Focus on empowering your team to be super heroes.

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