

A VIEW FROM SUE UNERMAN

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# The five key tactics of a brave leader

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## Don't let fear paralyse you in the workplace

“Comfortable spaces to have uncomfortable conversations”

So said Gemma Greaves, the Marketing Society chief executive, as she introduced this year's conference at the Science Museum.

In 2016 I praised the conference content but remarked about the lack of gender diversity on stage. As a result Gemma recruited me to her conference panel for this year.

Let's get that elephant out of the room first of all: the gender balance this year was significantly better, and the first five to speak on stage were women.

The theme for this year was “brave”. Dr Emma Barrett OBE dissected bravery, giving five key tactics of a brave leader.

- Role model courage (and fake it if you don't feel it).
- Reduce uncertainty through excellent preparation.
- Enhance self-efficacy – replace the doubting voice in your head with a cheerleader.
- Maintain focus on the goal.
- Fail well – if something goes wrong be resilient and learn from it.
- Remember the motivation – the bigger the why for being brave in the first place the better – you need passion about the cause.
- The extraordinary Raha [Moharrack](#), who is the first Saudi women ever to climb Everest, gave us an insight into her motivation. Her dad said no to her when she asked him if she could climb a mountain, and that “no” made her more determined than ever to do it anyway: “the word grew fangs and tore at my soul”.

Maya Angelou said, “Bitterness is like cancer. It eats upon the host. But anger is like fire. It burns all clean.” Turning anger into fuel is a great way for getting you places including, of course, up a mountain.

Two outstanding marketing chiefs then brought us back to bravery in work. Syl Saller (Diageo) and Andrew Clarke (Mars) described how and when they're brave.

Syl described the importance of owning the selling of a brave initiative – that you must convince your boss, your colleagues, your team and always yourself.

Andrew explained the need, especially in times of retrenchment, to share, to trust, to explore and to let go of control.

Dr Barrett used extremes of physical danger to illustrate brave techniques. Moharrack said

that despite climbing mountains (in what looked like atrocious conditions), her most scary moment was when she sent an email to her father appealing to him to change his mind and give his permission and his blessing to her first adventure.

Fear of her father trumped fear of falling.

Fear of disapproval can paralyse people in the workplace. We want cast iron substantiation when we challenge, when those who we are fearful of challenging may simply want to hear a different point of view and an alternative hypothesis.

Let's remember that even if we don't win the argument we won't fall off the mountain. 2018 is the time to be brave.

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