

# Fearless Leadership

Why your team needs fearless leaders  
to exceed your objectives

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## About Corrinne Armour

Waging a war on wasted potential, Corrinne's mission is to empower leaders and teams step up to Fearless Leadership. She helps leaders overcome the sense that they and their people can do better.

Corrinne is a highly regarded leadership speaker, mentor and coach. She is co-author of 'Developing Direct Reports: Taking the guesswork out of leading leaders' and 'Cracking the Code for Workshop Performance'. She is author of the forthcoming 'Stop Messing Around; Releasing the potential in your career, your team and your organisation'.



Known for her energy, courage, positivity, innovative approach, and strong results focus, Corrinne is seen as a provoker of change and growth. She works with leaders and teams from a diverse range of industries, such as finance, government, construction, arts and aged care.

Passionate about social justice, Corrinne is on the Board of Wintringham, a Victorian company delivering aged care to homeless elderly. She has also spent two years teaching English in a refugee camp on the edge of a war-zone.

At home, she is a wife and mother to two gorgeous young girls.

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# Fearless Leadership: Why your team needs fearless leaders to exceed your objectives

**Fearless Leadership: Anything less is a productivity tax you can't afford to pay**



The current climate in which leadership teams are operating presents new challenges that require different skills, behaviours and actions.

The military use the acronym VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity), which in the past was used to describe environments more commonly associated with war zones. More recently it has been used in the corporate world to describe the global market.<sup>1</sup>

- Volatility: change happens rapidly and on a large scale.
- Uncertainty: the future cannot be predicted with any precision.
- Complexity: challenges are complicated by many factors and there are few single causes or solutions.
- Ambiguity: there is little clarity on what events mean and what effect they may have.

In this VUCA environment, being able to access the combined wisdom, insight and experience of the entire executive team is more critical than ever. It's an environment where Fearless Leadership provides an essential competitive edge.

## It's challenging to play in a team. It's even more challenging to lead a team

Leadership teams often face these challenges:

### 1) Limited resources

Not many leaders complain that they are over resourced. The market is tight, and leaders have to do a great deal more with less.



As I write this paper, the lead headline on The Age Business Day website reads: *Jobs slashed as commodity storm hits copper miners.*<sup>ii</sup> Of the other seven featured stories, one is about the World Bank cutting growth forecast, and four are glum stories about declining markets. We could debate the tendency of the media to publish bad news stories, or we could accept that doing more (or at least the same) with less is a common expectation.

One of my clients recently reduced their executive team from seven to four, while still providing the same level of service across three major sites—this not an uncommon story.

### 2) Misunderstanding and friction

Diversity is good right? Most of us have experienced the *value* of diversity in a team: diversity in gender, background, and leadership styles.<sup>iii iv</sup>

So why is it so hard to work with people who have different views and approaches to us? Despite positive intentions, frustration and tension can result from diverse communication styles around the executive table—reaching decisions becomes challenging.

Diversity of style often creates misunderstanding and friction. In low-performing teams where trust is limited, *difference* is often seen to equal *wrong*, further reducing trust and damaging the fabric of the team.

### 3) Group of divisional heads

Leadership teams often see themselves as a group of divisional heads rather than the co-leaders of the organisation. Silo structures and thinking can lead to tension around the executive table. At worst,

strong divisional allegiances, reinforced by ego, can result in competitive behavior that is counter to team and organisational effectiveness.

These challenges, competing demands and apparent contradictions can result in the leader and the team questioning whether they have what it takes to build an extraordinary team.



## Why it matters when Fearless Leadership is missing

Why do some leadership teams create great dynamics enabling them to become high achievers, while others appear dysfunctional, even though on paper both may have the same potential?

Here is my model of team development.



Figure 1: Team Development Model © Corrine Armour 2015

**Dysfunctional** teams typically have a high turnover, low morale, poor communication, little or no trust, and low clarity surrounding team purpose and goals. They use 'us' and 'them' labels. They are suspicious of the motives of others, and diversity in style can lead to judgments of 'right' and 'wrong'. Conflict is often a sign of a dysfunctional team.

**Functioning** teams usually have some idea of their purpose. While diversity in a functioning team may be tolerated, there is little understanding of how to leverage this. Conflict may be avoided by suppressing disagreement. Activity drains energy, so it takes a lot of effort to get things done.

There may be an overly high reliance on the leader and little empowerment of team members to act. At the other end of the scale, a functioning team may experience an absence of leadership and yet perform at this level because of the talent of some team members.

**Performing** teams uphold a strong sense of development—there's belief in the notion that this team can go places. Team purpose is understood, and goals are clear and shared. Conflict is surfaced (and may even be messy), and the team learns from this.

Within every team is a **tipping point**, where the impact of the team is magnified with no more effort. This is where the team magic begins to materialise.

**Successful** teams fulfill potential; the leader is leading! There is heightened trust, clear and shared goals, and a shared collective reality. Individuals understand their own motivational drivers and the motivational profile of the team. Diversity is valued and leveraged.

Being successful is the aspirational goal of most teams, and yet I know there is another level of team development above successful—extraordinary.



**Extraordinary** teams have embraced **Fearless Leadership**. An extraordinary team functions like a world-class symphony orchestra and is exceeding objectives. 'Productive conflict' is the source of creativity, as the team leverages diversity of thinking. Communication is open and collaborative. In

extraordinary teams, there is a shared purpose, so what's in and out of scope is clear. People are playing to their strengths. Activity generates energy, so people leave on Friday night just as energised as they were on Monday morning.

When I work with teams, I am often surprised by their honesty in assessing the current level of their team. This is a valuable discussion for a leadership team to have. Enabling a frank discussion about where the team is at now, and the evidence for that, allows a shared understanding to develop. This discussion also surfaces inherent strengths within the team and opportunities for improvement.

## Building extraordinary teams: Why Fearless Leadership is the vital ingredient

Fearless Leadership builds extraordinary leaders and extraordinary teams.

Fearless Leadership is not a complete absence of fear – that would be dangerous.

On an individual level, Fearless Leadership is about recognising fear and using it as data—just as Susan Jeffers (2006) says in the title of her fabulous book, *Feel the fear and do it anyway*.



Leadership is about making decisions. Fearless leaders make the hard decisions that need to be made, communicated, and implemented.

*Fearless Leadership* is about having the hard conversations – the conversations that you know need to be had. It's about having these conversations in ways that build relationships rather than bruise them.

Fearless Leadership at a team level results from the intersection of **purpose**, **motivation** and **communication**. **Trust** is crucial to Fearless Leadership.

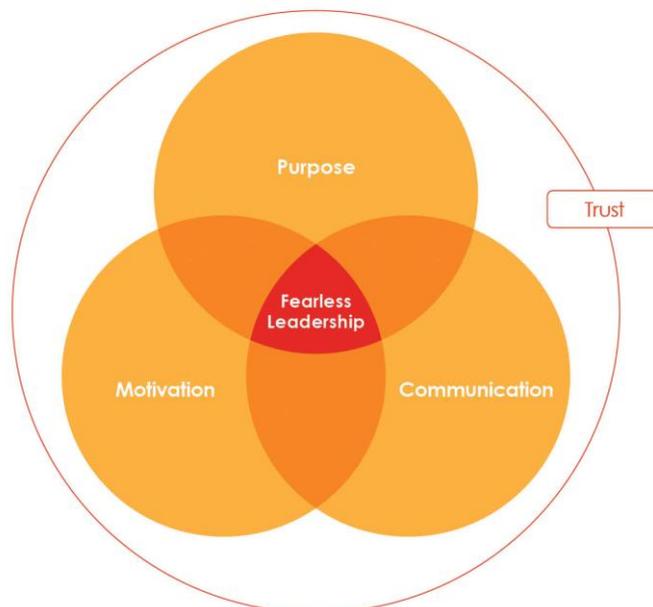


Figure 2: Fearless Leadership © Corrine Armour 2015

## Purpose

Aligned purpose underpins vision and enables results. When team members are all pulling in different directions, very little happens. With clear purpose everyone is pulling in the same direction for the same reason, and anything is possible.

*“Efforts and courage are not enough without purpose and direction.”*

—John F. Kennedy

Purpose exists at three levels: **individual**, **team**, and **organisational**. When all three levels of purpose are aligned—within each person and the team—the team has the potential to be extraordinary.

While the organisational purpose is usually clear and people may know their own purpose, the team level purpose usually has the least clarity.

Think of a beehive: the purpose is clear and understood at each level. It takes a group of 12 bees a lifetime to produce a teaspoon of honey, and yet one hive can produce around 27kg of honey in a good season.

“People don’t care what you do, they care why you do it.” (Sinek)—in other words, get clear on purpose.

Hiroataka Takeuchi, Management Professor at Harvard Business School proposes an ‘inside-out strategy’ (Safian, 2014). He maintains that, “Purpose is at the essence of why firms exist. There is nothing mushy about it—it is pure strategy. Purpose is very idealistic, but at the same time very practical”.

Robert Wong, Executive Creative Director of Google Creative Lab is guided by what he calls *the four Ps*, which stand for purpose, people, products, and process—with purpose as the most important. “If you choose the right purpose, certain people will be attracted,” says Wong. “They will be motivated and unified.” (Safian, 2014)

## Motivation

*“Strength lies in differences, not in similarities.”*

—Stephen Covey

Take the guesswork out of team play. Knowing what motivates team members at work, and how to communicate within these motivators, assists understanding,

increases connection and leverages diversity. Awareness of individual and team motivational profiles allow everyone in the team to play to their strengths.

Motivation provides people with a reason to act in a certain way. It is a powerful force in filtering and translating experiences.

Motivational patterns are the below conscious building blocks of a motivational profile. These motivational patterns are the unconscious sorting filters in our mind that determine what we pay attention to in our environment – what we filter in to and out of our experience. This sorting function happens outside our conscious awareness and drives how we think, feel and act, and is central to communication and leadership style, and the quality of relationships.

You can think of your motivational profile as the strings that control the puppet. While we see the behaviour—what the puppet actually does—we know it's the strings that direct the activity.

Accessing this motivational profile provides the necessary clues to customising your leadership and achieving your objectives *faster*. When motivations are understood within teams, distractions can be bypassed and discretionary effort unleashed.

## Communication

*“If you don't learn to communicate well, you don't get to do anything that's fun.”*

*—Peter Drucker*

Effective communication is the key that unlocks the treasure chest. Open, intelligent, and fearless communication builds extraordinary teams. Economic times are uncertain. For a team to make sense of all information available, to understand indicators and to draw on the talents of the whole executive team, then open, intelligent and fearless conversations are the price of entry.



The environment in which we operate is increasingly complex and fast paced. To match this, organisations are increasing in complexity.

'Complicatedness' increased by an average of 6.7% a year over the past 50 years (Yves, 2011). In an increasingly complex workplace, good communication across the leadership team is critical.

Communication is how people talk to themselves, as well as how they relate within the team and beyond. Extraordinary teams have the knowledge of communication, skills, frameworks and agreements to communicate openly and powerfully.

## Trust

Trust is central. Trust enables everything. It allows people to be vulnerable and open, and lead from whom they truly are. Building trust is a work in progress. Building trust *must* come first because trust is essential for any team to be extraordinary.

*"Few delights can equal the presence of one whom we trust utterly."*

—George MacDonald

The *Oxford Dictionary* defines trust as, "Firm belief in the reliability, truth, or ability of someone or something". While this is a reasonable intellectual definition, it falls short as it fails to capture the feeling that is inherent when we feel trust in someone or something.

Trust is more than just reliability. Connectedness and common purpose or belief are essential factors of trust in an extraordinary team.

For the last 14 years, PR company Edelman (Edelman, 2014) has been undertaking an extensive global survey on trust as it relates to private businesses, NFPs, and government and non-government institutions. In their 2014 survey they found that there continues to be a crisis of trust in the leadership of business. Only one in five people trust a business leader to tell the truth and CEOs have lower credibility compared with other potential spokespeople.<sup>v</sup>

So if only one in five people trust business leaders, what's the true level of trust within your leadership team?

Given that global studies by companies like LRN have repeatedly shown that trust is an essential component for engagement: to what extend is your team trusted by your people and other key stakeholders?<sup>vi</sup>

In short: trust matters!

I engage with smart, enthusiastic teams who individually are highly committed to the purpose of their organisations. So how does trust become an issue?

Recent advances in neuroscience are providing insights into the biology of trust and how, as leaders, we can respond.

1) The brain perceives a threat five times faster than a reward. So when tensions are heightened around the boardroom table, it's not surprising that people imagine the worst. A threat response reduces the capacity for insight and solution focus—not a state you want for your leadership team.

2) Different areas of the brain are involved when we engage with friends and foes. When you perceive your colleagues as competitors or enemies (and, therefore, invoke a 'threat response' – no matter how mild), you may be reducing your access to creative thought and limiting the capacity of the team.

3) Trust releases oxytocin that calms the amygdala. The amygdala is responsible for your fight-flight-freeze response. You may have heard the term 'amygdala hijack'. This describes an immediate and overwhelming emotional response that is out of proportion to the actual stimulus. The hormone oxytocin has been associated with decreased amygdala activation and is stimulated by trust. In times of change or uncertainty, the greater the trust in the team, the greater the threat response can be accommodated and the faster the team can move on.

Developing and maintaining trust is critical in becoming an extraordinary team.

## The finer distinctions of Fearless Leadership

The next level of understanding of Fearless Leadership comes from exploring further distinctions of the Fearless Leadership model.

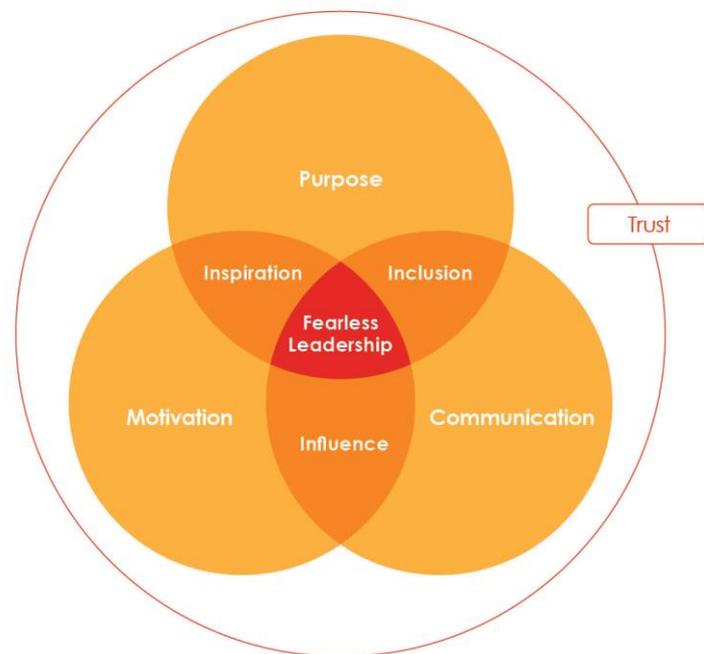


Figure 3: Fearless Leadership Distinctions © Corrinne Armour 2015

**Inspiration:** Inspiration is the reason we do what we do. Inspiration results when the team shares a common purpose and is working with what motivates team members both individually and collectively.

**Inclusion:** Connect and harness the full talent and diversity of the team through inclusion. Passengers drain resource without return. Inclusion connects everyone within, ensuring there are no passengers.

**Influence:** Influence gets the right things done. A team without influence is a wasted opportunity. When you know what motivates people and how to communicate effectively, influence is a natural consequence.

Inspiration, inclusion and influence create the magic experienced within a dynamic, energised, collaborative and effective leadership team. This magic is also evident to others outside the team – staff, customers and stakeholders. It's a magic that comes from fostering purpose, motivation, communication and trust.

This magic is Fearless Leadership.

## Exceed your objectives through Fearless Leadership

You need your leaders and your leadership team to model the culture and dynamic you want, throughout the organisation.

To exceed your objectives, you need Fearless Leadership.

*Corrinne Armour helps leaders and teams get out of their own way and exceed their objectives.*

*She offers a range of programs to help leaders adopt Fearless Leadership. To find out more either get in touch with Corrinne on 0414 742 557 or [corrinne@corrinnearmour.com](mailto:corrinne@corrinnearmour.com) or her office on 03 9005 7437.*

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<sup>i</sup> IBM study of over 1500 CEOs (Capitalizing on Complexity, 2010)

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.theage.com.au/business>

<sup>iii</sup> Companies ranked in the top quartile of executive-board diversity boasted a 53% on average higher return on equity (ROE) than those ranked in the bottom quartile (Barta, Kleiner, & Neumann, 2012).

<sup>iv</sup> Diversity is a key driver of innovation and is a critical component of being successful on a global scale (Global Diversity and Inclusion, 2001).

<sup>v</sup> The 2014 Edelman Trust Barometer is the firm's 14th annual exploration of trust, surveying 33,000 people in 27 markets around the world.

<sup>vi</sup> LRN's global HOW Report findings provide the equivalent of an MRI on the current state of governance, culture, and leadership across the world. In a global empirical analysis of over 36,000 employees in 18 countries, LRN found strong and compelling evidence that inspiring employees to self-govern through increased trust, shared values, and a deep understanding of and commitment to a purpose-inspired mission produced competitive advantage and superior business performance.