



Courageous Leadership

One hour to quash the tummy flies in your butter!

Diana Osagie

Courageous Leadership: One hour to quash the tummy flies in your butter!

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Me?

Diana Osagie. Former secondary school head teacher. Present day coach, mentor, trainer and friend. Pleased to meet you.

I do the hard stuff; leading in challenging circumstances and advocating for those who don't have a voice. I'm 6ft tall and built like a barn door. I think I'm made that way on purpose, because you can sense the type of leader I am when I walk in the room.

I'm not brilliant at subtlety. I work hard, love hard and play hard. If I'm on your side, you WILL win. With me, it's 100% or nothing.

But, I'm an introvert and often prefer my own company. My ideal Sunday evening is spent with a pink G&T, watching Columbo on TV, and wearing my bunny rabbit onesie. On the flip side, my ideal Monday morning is back in the thick of leadership, pushing towards great things on behalf of others.

You?

At a guess, you're a leader, browsing through the sea of literature on leadership, and you've stumbled upon my book because of the lovely front cover (there's a certain captivating quality, don't you think?).

Perhaps you are totally courageous already and looking to add to your repertoire.

Or, possibly you are a little bit brave, but in need of a dollop of courage to get through this phase of your journey.

Maybe, you are utterly fearful and are wondering how on earth you were ever appointed to this role and worried about what you are going to do to succeed?

Whatever the case, this book is for you. It will take about an hour to read, so grab a drink and some Pringles, and dive right in.

Caveats.

I have changed some names.

I have changed some titles.

I have changed some dates.

That's it, the rest is all as it was – and as it still is.

However, this is real life and I'm telling my story, so if you recognise yourself within these pages, CELEBRATE. Good or bad, at least I remember you!

Love and hugs go out to...

My God

My mum and dad

My brother and sister

My husband (very supportive - when the football isn't on)

My teams

My students

My governors

My wicked suede jacket that always made me feel invincible

My church crew

My shoes once (they have magical powers and make me feel sooooo good)

May I just say?

No one is ever self-made. Those who say so are LIARS and UNGRATEFUL. Everyone has accessed support at some time - seen or unseen.

A grandmother who prayed.

A spouse who had dinner ready, in spite of their own awful day.

The kids who went without a goodnight kiss and didn't complain because you had another late night.

A teacher who persevered so that you could become better.

A government that, for all its faults, maintained a free education system for you to access.

Come on now, people, nobody gets to the top without using a ladder, the lift or stairs. You don't have wings!

Rant over.

Why 'Courageous Leadership' - The Book?

Because I can reach only a few of you with workshops, keynote speeches and webinars. This book will take about an hour to read and I will pour into you everything I have learnt so far on leading with courage.

This is not the 'theology of courage'. You can google that.

I propose to give you:

- strategies I have used that work in leadership.
- strategies I have used that were terrible (obviously don't replicate these).
- my own tale of leadership in a challenging setting and how I was able to navigate through it without dying or killing someone.

You'll get my heart, my tears, and my triumphs - all for under £10.

Warning.

I write with honesty and humour, and I really can't be bothered to make this academically intellectual. If you want the truth about leadership and strategies to overcome the hard times (and a romping good read to boot) then stick with me. Anything else, google it.

Diana x

This is not a story book, but...

Going to the school hall, checking in with my students about to sit their exam... Sumaya stood in line, clasping her pencil case, fear etched into her 15-year old features. I held her hand, as she whispered to me...

“Miss, I have tummy flies in my butter.”

I knew what she meant. Now was not the time to correct her (beautiful) use of language.

“I know, me too. Let’s go in together.”

I am not an expert, I am not polished, perfected or finished.

I am, however, a successful head teacher who doesn’t mind sharing the lessons of leadership gained through challenging circumstances. Success comes with messy bits, and mine came with the stuff I got completely wrong as well as the stuff that went brilliantly. I’ll share the lot with you, so take what is useful and leave the rest.

However, here’s a bit I think I got really right...

In the summer of 2016, after 16 years of senior leadership, I was able to articulate what I call ‘The 7 Statements of Courageous Leadership’.

Each chapter reflects one statement. They are not sequential, so please dip in and out as you like.

The 7 Statements of Courageous Leadership

- ❖ I will always feel fear, but I will limit the influence that fear has on my actions and thoughts.

- ❖ I know the absence of strength is weakness, but that having strength under control is humility. My strength is under control.

- ❖ I can work on my own, I can work through others, I can work with others.

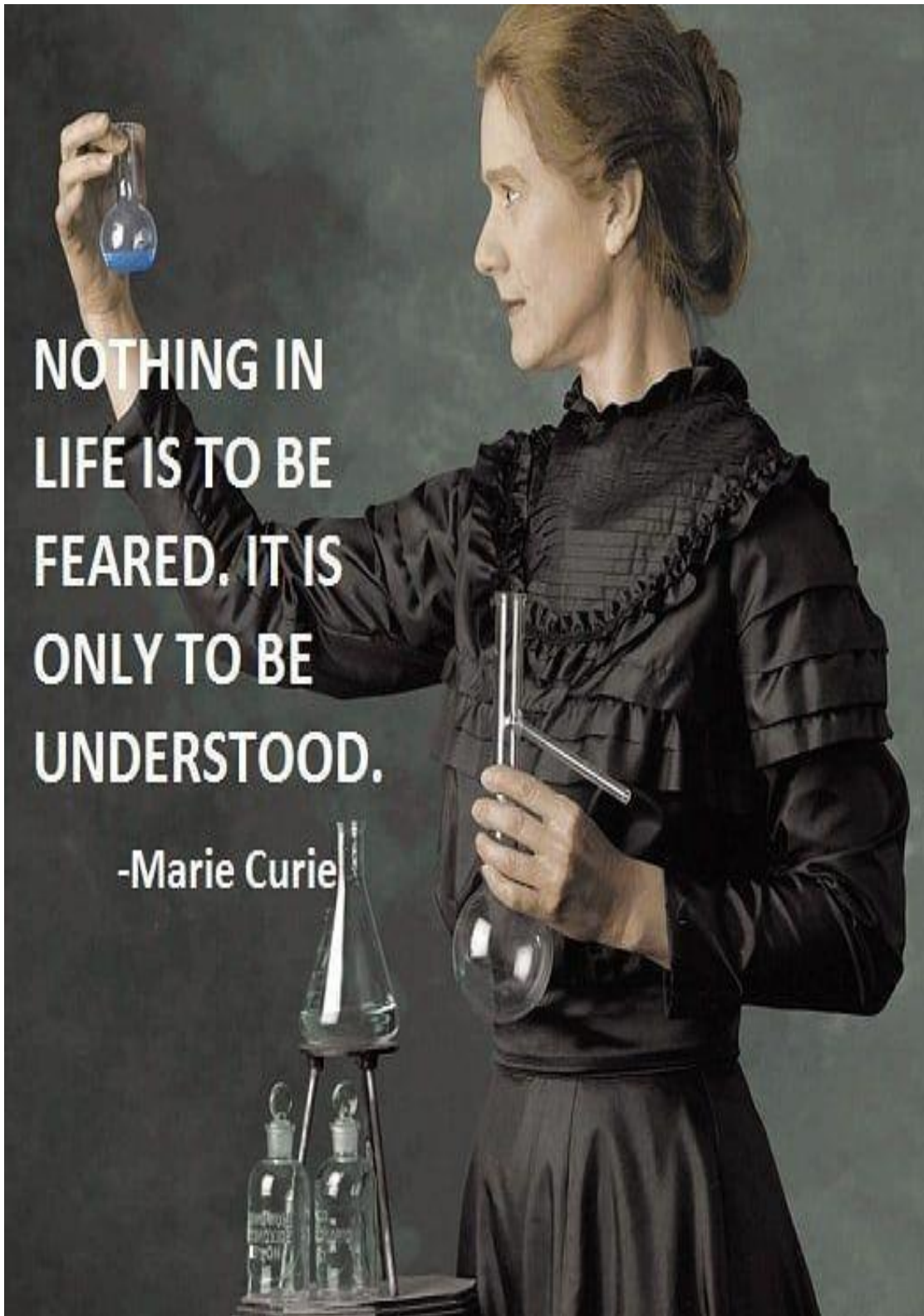
- ❖ I am human first and a leader second. I remember the importance of family, love, compassion and grace.

- ❖ Leadership has weight. I have the emotional and physical strength to carry it.

- ❖ I am accurate and exacting, so if it's going to be done... then let's do it right.

- ❖ I am relentless and consistent in the things that matter. I have developed insight into what matters.

Sample chapter

A woman, likely Marie Curie, is shown in profile, wearing a dark, high-collared, long-sleeved dress with ruffles. She is holding a small round-bottom flask containing a blue liquid in her right hand, and a test tube in her left hand. In the foreground, there is a laboratory setup with a glass flask on a stand, and two smaller glass bottles on a tray. The background is a plain, dark grey wall.

**NOTHING IN
LIFE IS TO BE
FEARED. IT IS
ONLY TO BE
UNDERSTOOD.**

-Marie Curie

Sample chapter

Chapter One

I will always feel fear, but I will limit the influence that fear has on my actions and thoughts.

Sample chapter

September 2010.

Appointed to the post of Head Teacher.

I couldn't wait for that first training day of the new term. The one where the staff are all gathered together after the summer break, looking and feeling great. A new leadership team, a new vision, a new day... and I was at the helm. There was no fear. Countless training days, assemblies and staff meetings all under my belt. This was nothing different.

Yes, I was the head teacher, but I was still Diana.

"Let's do this." I said.

All was well, leadership was great.

January 2011

Oh my life! Christmas was rubbish and I dreaded going back to school. I had inherited a crazy financial deficit from the previous SLT and I found myself at the point of having to announce redundancies to a school community that had NEVER experienced that before. It all kicked off.

The nasty targeted emails and letters.

The anonymous emails and letters sent by staff to the local MP and DFES.¹

The anonymous emails and letters to the Chair of Governors.

The open letters to the whole Governing Body, which began their narrative with, "*We the undersigned....*" You know the type I mean.

The fake smiles.

The endless notifications of yet another staff union meeting and the list of demands that would land on my desk the next morning.

¹ The member of parliament (MP) for our area just happened to be the leader of the opposition party in government at the time...wonderful!
DFES – Department for Education and Standards...triple wonderful!

Look, I'm a physical presence, whether I want to be or not. I can deadlift over 100kg, and I'm no shrinking violet. When I'd walked into a room, I'd become used to commanding authority, whatever the situation. Yet during this hideous time of January 2011, I flinched if my office phone rang. I was filled with dread at the thought of email notifications. Every day was painful, my head hurt, and my emotions were shot. I was simply scared, and panic was my default.

I became terrified of making mistakes; so much so that I ironically ended up making even more. I later found out that the staff had taken a sweepstake on how many grammatical errors they could find in my emails. Nice. I was scared of influential staff who were galvanising their more vulnerable counterparts against me. I was scared of losing my job. I was scared that in the midst of this, all my students would fail their GCSEs. I was scared that I'd be discovered as an inadequate head teacher and that someone would turf me out.

Though we can sometimes overlook the good things, I remember that there were indeed some members of my staff who were for me through all of this, and I will always be grateful for their love and support. These were the colleagues who could see that the redundancy situation was not personal, and knew that I just happened to be the head teacher at this point of the school's journey. Some even saw the effect this was having on me personally, even though I didn't realise they were watching. They brought titbits of food to my office, came and made me laugh with a quip, and a couple would just come and hug me without saying a word. I had

phenomenal governors on my side, too; wise owls who knew what to do, and when.

But, I still had fear.

I want to tell you that I morphed into some kind of brave and imposing lion, who roared and shook off the fear by charging victoriously across the plains. I can't lie, though. I simply put my head down and got through it.

Colleagues; fear will always be there. It's a valid emotion and has its place. It holds you from straying into arrogance, believing you are above confidence. What I've learned to do is to acknowledge its presence and then say to myself (out loud, sometimes):

- Fear, you are here, but you will not stop me from doing what is right, just and fair.
- Fear, I will put the young people and the wider school community first. It is easier to cave into your silly or immoral demands, but I refuse to go there.
- Fear, you will not stop me answering the phone or reading my emails (yes, it really did come to that).
- Fear, you will not stop me going to the staff meeting with a good attitude. I am well prepared.

If influence means *'the power to be a compelling force'*, then there must come a time when you say to fear –“The compulsion you have over me to act, think or feel a certain way has to end.”

Just think on that for a moment. Not only professionally, but in relation to your life as a whole. There simply must come a time when you say to your fears, “ENOUGH”. I promised that I would share my warts with you in this book, so here goes.

- I feared not being liked (I hadn't long come through a very messy divorce, and relationships were a sore point in my life).
- I feared being seen as incompetent.
- I feared that my background as a council estate kid and a non-Russell Group university graduate would be seen as a negative.
- I feared that others who I was leading knew more than me, and that I was the inept one. I remember an influential colleague sniggering that I went to Wolverhampton University, whilst he'd gone to Cambridge – and didn't we all know about it.

I came to a place where I had to tell these fears, which were screaming loudly inside my head, demanding attention and nourishment, “ENOUGH”. I had to tell myself to stop crying on the sofa in the evenings. Looking back, I wish I had shared my fears with someone at the time. A coach from the outside would have been invaluable to me. I should have sought advice and support for myself earlier. Please make sure you do this if any of this resonates!

I tried to be an all-knowing, forever strong, super head teacher.

Nonsense.

With all this going on, my mask didn't slip once. Inside, I was trembling for days on end, but I never allowed it to show. I smiled, I walked the corridors, and I greeted everyone I met. I did this quite deliberately, because one of the anonymous letters to the governors had levelled the accusation that I never smiled! I quickly worked out who wrote that particular letter and smiled at her the most, which probably terrified her. I power dressed. I worked late and I started early. I wore the leadership mask skilfully. Nobody knew what it was like. I shared the story with a few people later on, but at the time, I suffered alone. This was in no way the right or best thing to do.

Colleagues; suffering in silence is never necessary and is a foolish move. Suffering in silence does not make you 'resilient'. It makes you ill.

My advice?

First - Make it compulsory to have support for your leadership journey. Not through one of those tokenistic ad-hoc meetings, where you are 'mentored' by an 'experienced' colleague for an hour once a term. I'm talking about meaningful, accessible, confidential support. You owe it to yourself as a primary responsibility to ensure this is in place. Don't leave it to the governors or to your line manager to organise for you. Secure the level of support you will need to be successful in your leadership journey, and know that a good governing body or line manager will pay for it! If

they don't, go right ahead and invest in yourself anyway! It will be worth it, much as the cost stings.

Second – If it scares you, whatever it is, admit it, share it, and deal with it. I had issues of rejection stemming from the divorce that caused initial fear in me, but it would be a cold day in Hell before I was about to admit that to anyone! It took me over a decade to deal with that inner fear – and by that time, I was remarried for goodness sake! I carried that fear inside me for ten years. TEN years! Imagine what I could have achieved if I had dealt with it in under one? I was naïve in thinking that I could push the fear of rejection deep enough into my soul to the point where it would have no effect on my leadership. I was an idiot.

Let me say this with all love and concern for you. Fear is like a cancer. It spreads. It is never contained to one area of your life, but will wrap its tentacles around you in all sorts of places, bringing about all manner of consequences as it tightens.

Why do I use the analogy of cancer? My dad passed away in 2007 from pancreatic cancer. He was diagnosed in the February, and was dead by April. The cancer spread in a way that took everyone by surprise. There had been signs, though. For over a year, dad had been complaining of not feeling very well. Nothing specific, just not feeling himself. When we asked him about it each day, it was clear he was merely learning to live around this feeling.

Unsurprisingly, malignant cancers very rarely (if ever) heal themselves. You have to intervene in a dramatic and convincing way to stand any

chance of winning. You have to entirely negate the influence the cancer has upon the body. Sometimes, the treatment feels worse than the disease itself, but if you are not aggressive with cancer, it will do its utmost to regain its influential position and limit your life in its process.

“Whoa!” I hear you cry! “Diana, that’s a bit strong, likening internal fear to cancer, eh?”

Yes, the imagery is strong, but I bet everyone reading this understands the potential power of fear now you have such vivid pictures in your head. You can see why it’s vital that you limit the influence fear has on your life if you’re going to make it out of this alive.

It’s not about rushing around your organisation, baring your leadership teeth and growling via email. You need to deal with your internal fears so that you can lead without limitation. Fear of rejection stemming from my private life showed up in my leadership journey, simply by me not wanting to have those ‘difficult conversations’ with people. As a head teacher, this was a slight issue, as there is only so much you can delegate to your deputies. Oh, and also, I really wanted to be liked. The financial deficit was not my fault, and I didn’t want my staff to see me in a negative way because of the strong action I was forced to take. I wanted a pleasant working environment for us all to thrive in, but I didn’t get that, and the toxicity was killing us all.

Over again in my head, the same conversation played out.

“But what if the unions rise up and call another strike?”

“But what if this gets in the newspapers and parents see the negative press?”

“But what if key staff leave purely through preference and choice?”

These fearful ‘what ifs’ plagued my mind for days on end. I danced around conversations I should have had because I was so deeply afraid. I didn’t want to experience leadership rejection. I wanted to have the right answer, to every problem, every time, and to keep everyone happy in the process. My internal fear limited the early stages of my leadership prowess.

So now, do you get it?

Fear - don’t play patten-cake with it.

Fear - don’t learn to live with it.

Fear - don’t ignore it and hope it goes away by itself. It won’t. It will probably pop up at the most awkward moment, like when you hear a piece of music in the Year 10 assembly, which sets you off in floods of tears and you have to make your babbled apologies through sobs and exit via the fire doors.

Get support, deal with your fear, and conquer it.

Oh, by the way, I need to add a little bit extra to this chapter, because if I don’t, I will never hear the end of it.

There was one member of staff in particular who stood with me even when the fire was at its hottest. He would turn up at my office and do anything to make me smile. He would listen to the little information that I was willing to share and was a true confidant. He refused to sign the 'We the undersigned...' letters, along with some of his peers. He came in to work on strike days and helped the Senior Leadership Team teach the whole of Year 11 to get them through their exams. He saw the woman behind the head teacher. Always respectful, genuinely concerned, he had my back.

So I married him.

Then I told him to leave.

My job was hard enough without having to hold my husband to account in the workplace!

This is not the end, but you will need to buy the book for the rest!

Sample chapter