



## Find your fearless

*Leaders need courage to have difficult conversations*

**A NUMBER OF MONTHS AGO**, my husband and I visited my nephew, Bryan, his wife, Laura, and their three kids, Will (12), Clare (10) and Elizabeth (7) in Austin, Texas. It was a great city to visit for the first time. It was better fun to be with the kids and experience their creative spirits.

---

*"It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our friends."*

– Anonymous

---

During a trip to the grocery store, I discovered packs of Kleenex with messages on them. When we returned, I placed the packs upside down on the counter and told the kids that they could choose one pack and the message on the other side was meant just for them. Will selected "Summon Your Strength," Elizabeth chose "Believe in Yourself" and Clare selected "Find Your Fearless." The kids were very intrigued by the notion that facial tissue could have a message especially for them. We enjoyed magical time with them before returning to Milwaukee.

A day later, the phone rang. A young voice announced: "This is Clare, Aunt Karen."

Clare wanted me to know that when she went to her friend's house for a sleepover Saturday night, she found her fearless! The kids

slept in a room full of dolls that Clare described as all having black eyes. "I was really scared," she said. "And then I remembered my Kleenex....Find Your Fearless. I thought about it. I kept thinking, 'I can do this' and I found my fearless and I was able to sleep all night, and I really had a great time," she said.

As I reflected on Clare's experience, I thought about the ways that, as leaders, we are called upon to Find our Fearless. There are countless ways today that we have the opportunity to live with courage, to use our voices to influence and our power to make a difference in the lives of others.

The political climate today has taken a toll on personal and professional relationships. We are afraid to invite conversations with those with whom we have a difference in opinion, beliefs, etc. – even those we consider colleagues or friends.

Dawna Markova and Angie McArthur offer a way to Find our Fearless and dig into the conversations in their book, "Reconcilable Differences: Connecting in a Disconnected World." They acknowledge how difficult it is to "dig in" when we are at odds with another.

Their "Kleenex message" includes replacing what they call limiting beliefs with beliefs that will liberate. They remind us that you can't make another love, respect or even like you. You can, however, find a way to respect yourself and how you are relating to the other no matter what. The authors define respect as "the ability to see again, as if for the first time."

With this framework, Markova and McArthur suggest that the "greatest gift we can give each other and ourselves is a willingness to question our biases, see past our blind spots and discover each other again."

The authors offer three questions for us to consider when we engage in a difficult conversation with someone who does not think as

we do. The questions require that we find our fearless, embrace our courage and ask:

1. "Here's how you are specifically important to me...How am I important to you?"
2. "What's the most important thing to you right now in the issues that have come up between us?"
3. "Are you open to hearing what's most important to me?"

The process isn't easy. It's messy. It's not linear. There are no perfect roadmaps and yet, we do have the responsibility as leaders to advance the conversation, to listen to what is important to the other and to discover common ground.

Thank you, Clare, for reminding me that it's important to pay attention, to know when I need to step in with courage and Find my Fearless. ■



### KAREN VERNAL

*Karen Vernal is the president of Vernal Management Consultants LLC, a Milwaukee-based leadership and organizational firm. For more information, visit [vernalmgmt.com](http://vernalmgmt.com).*