

# executive reflection

BI-MONTHLY THOUGHTS FOR LEADERS OF HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE



## FEAR

### WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU WEREN'T AFRAID?

Infants are born fearing only two things: loud noises and falling.

There is a clear evolutionary imperative for these fears so they persist into adulthood - just try bursting a paper bag behind someone... or engaging them in the idea of bungee jumping.

All other fears are learned - acquired from peers and parents. This is itself a terrifying idea, for almost every noble achievement has at its heart the overcoming of personal fears to advance a cause.

In 49 BC Julius Caesar ignored the Senate, crossing the Rubicon and taking an army into Rome, ultimately creating an Empire. In the 1400s sailors quite literally sailed 'off the chart' to find new continents. In the 1950s Rosa Parks stood firm on the Montgomery City bus crystallising a revolution. In the 1960s Apollo astronauts hurled themselves into the void on exploding cylinders because space is "what comes next".



*But I could show my prowess, be a lion not a mou-ess*

*If I only had the nerve.*

*I'd be brave as a blizzard....*

*I'd be gentle as a lizard....*

*I'd be clever as a gizzard....*

*If the Wizard is a Wizard who will serve*

When fear is not overcome, we play marginally. We manage risk to ourselves rather than to our cause. We become entrenched, immutable, obdurate... in short, we cease to evolve.

This pattern is all around us. Our peers and staff instinctively work to maintain the status quo however unsatisfactory – "better the devil we know..." They believe change is personally threatening. This endemic fear quite literally petrifies our organisations.

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So if we are born with only two fears – where do we learn to fear change? As leaders and parents we must be complicit in teaching this most deep-rooted antipathy.

We need to think on this deeply. Franklin D. Roosevelt said "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself".

What if we had leaders without fear? Ones who saw organisations inside the health service as no more than departments to be shaped as needed. What if they felt able to put their *role* at risk without feeling they had put themselves at risk?

What if we all held most deeply the idea that the NHS is a single entity serving the same patients; and that it can only win as a team not in parts?

Would these leaders not drive collaborations that might lead to the demise of their current organisation but which would help secure the future of the health service?

Should we not revere these people as the true servants of the health service? Would they not protect our future and give us all an appetite for what comes next?

I have seen it already – a Trust board offering to dissolve itself to make way for a new integrated care organisation.

John Steinbeck said: "it is in the nature of man to rise to greatness if greatness is expected of him".

The apparel company No Fear simply says: "If you are not living on the edge, you are taking up too much space".



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