

Excerpt Chapters 1 - 8

TRACEY EZARD

FEROCIOUS WARMTH

*School leaders
who inspire and transform*



FOREWORD

Dr Barbara Watterston

Ferocious Warmth leadership is testament to Tracey's talent to craft a narrative underpinned by her constant focus on authentically engaging in learning with others, enriching her language and repertoire of examples so that we too can be inspired in our learning and growth.

As is evidenced in all of her work, and now *Ferocious Warmth*, Tracey has the unique ability to capture the essence of a concept and eloquently explore it in great depth to inform and empower others. As a generous, energetic and collaborative author and consultant, her work is grounded in theory and evidence-informed practice and equally, enormously accessible to test and apply. Her choice of words and nuanced use of phrases immediately get to the heart of the matter in a way that we can all understand and relate to, stimulating reflection and impacting on our practice.

The interdependency of Ferocious Warmth leadership takes us from polarity to duality, from an either/or to a both/and focus on leading for results *with* compassion and vulnerability. This approach is informed by a rich tapestry of case study and academic research, with scenarios and gems of personal experiences and observations within and beyond the education sector.

Tracey has provided a transformative space for readers to challenge, interrogate and acknowledge all that they bring to their leadership. As I turned the pages of *Ferocious Warmth*, I smiled, reflected, questioned, admired and celebrated the messages, research and stories that Tracey has woven in such a way that resonate so viscerally. Leadership and learning are inextricably linked. There is no one size fits all.

Tracey guides us into crafting our own leadership identity in recognising our

strengths, being open to wisdom and feedback, *and* compassionately caring for self and others to provide the enabling conditions for all of us to do our best work. She illustrates this through the push and pull of the infinity symbol. Where polarities nestle together providing balance and perspective to making the right choice at the right time to enact leadership most effectively; 'knowing when to lift the bar, knowing when to deeply listen and hold the space'.

Tracey speaks of enlightening moments with others that sparked her thinking and tingled her senses. Prepare to be motivated and inspired. The sparks will continue as you take the journey through the pages of *Ferocious Warmth*.

Dr Lesley Murrirhy

Kia ora koutou

Ko Putauaki tōku maunga

Ko Tarawera tōku awa

Ko Ngati Pākehā tōku iwi

No Kawerau ahau

Ko Blakely tōku whānau

Ko John tōku tane

Ko Demelza ratou ko Nadia, ko Aaron, ko Sebastian, ko Melissa, ko Natasha, ko Zara, ko Serena āku tamariki

Ko au te tumuaki of te kura o Amesbury

Ko Lesley Murrirhy ahau

Nō reira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā tātou koutou

My name is Lesley Murrirhy and this is my pepeha. This tells you how I am connected to the land (through my mountain – Putauaki, and through my river –

Tarawera, and to Kawerau, the small North Island town in the Bay of Plenty, New Zealand, in which I was raised). It also tells you a bit about who I am connected to – my husband, John and our eight children, from Demelza who is the oldest and to Serena who is the youngest. I am from the Blakely family. I am a European New Zealander (Ngati Pākehā) and I am currently the principal (tumuaki) of Amesbury School. Therefore, I greet you all.

During lockdown I spent more time on social media than usual and I became not only incredibly frustrated but genuinely sick at heart. So much so that in the end I had to avoid social media altogether. Our country was doing well dealing with Covid-19 compared with much of the rest of the world and yet there was so much negativity against the people who I felt were doing their best and learning as they went along to protect our country during this unprecedented threat. After weeks and weeks of being Covid-free in the community, we had a small outbreak and the backlash was fevered. There seemed to be no middle ground – people were on one side or the other and they were often personally attacking in the way they expressed their views. Recent events in America have shown a similar trend but on a much bigger scale, more extreme and with shocking results.

It seems to me that there is nothing more important for our world right now than moving beyond Piaget's formal reasoning which includes binary logic and analytical thinking. This has been the dominant way of thinking of the 20th century and has led to the great scientific and technological achievements of the industrial society – achievements that have contributed so much to the evolution of human civilisation. But it is no longer serving us well and it *has* to become a global educational priority today for those in education to evolve their ability to think, but also to lay the foundations for an education that ensures our children and young people develop as both/and, integrative thinkers. Einstein said, 'The significant problems we have, cannot be solved at the same level of thinking with which we have created them.' We need a new way of thinking.

Ferocious Warmth focuses on just this issue and this reason alone would give me sufficient cause to write in support of this book. But wait...there's more. It is also warmly written with captivating stories and illuminating themes. I was particularly drawn in by the story Tracey tells of her own experience of loss and grief. As I read this portion of the book, I lost all sense of time and place, and I

found myself reflecting, as she does, on how my leadership has been shaped by every experience, every encounter, not just the professional ones or the nice tidy ones, but by all of the messiness of my whole life. Stories are woven through the book to provide practical illustrations of Ferocious Warmth leaders that each of us will be able to identify with but also be challenged by. NZ school principal, Sarah Martin (Chapter 10) and I meet together regularly to share our developing thinking about education and I can assure you that you will be hard pressed find a better example of a Ferocious Warmth leader. So please do take note.

Though *Ferocious Warmth* is written with warmth, humour and heart, Tracey Ezard is refreshingly blunt and tells it like it is, exposing the elephants in the room for all to see. I laughed out loud when she used the term ‘Spoilt Brat Syndrome’ to describe a tendency by some teachers to expect high levels of support but only accept low levels of challenge. She playfully suggests raising expectations and then watching ‘the fast and furious push back’. I have noticed this phenomena, but I have never had a label for it. Neither did I quite have the courage to actually say it out loud in public. Thank you, Tracey, it had to be said and now you have given me permission to also speak out this truth.

But to the crux of the matter. In his book *The Courage to Teach*, Parker Palmer said, ‘We distort things...because we are trained neither to voice both sides of an issue nor to listen with both ears... It is rooted in the fact that we look at the world through analytical lenses. We see everything as this or that, plus or minus, on or off, black or white; and we fragment reality into an endless series of either-ors. In a phrase, we think the world apart.’ Ferocious Warmth leaders are those who have learned to think the world back together again. They use heart and head to ensure wise leadership decision-making. They use both high support and high challenge so their staff don’t end up with ‘Spoilt Brat Syndrome’. They use cognitive and emotional intelligences to enable balanced outcomes. They are brave and vulnerable at the same time and evidence-based and innovative. Ezard describes this weaving of what appears to be polar opposites as a dance, ‘blending moves from both ferociousness and warmth’. In actual fact, they are not polar opposites but rather they are simply parts of a whole. I applaud Tracey Ezard for challenging a still pervasive siloed view of the world and of

leadership and for presenting in its place a holistic, multidimensional view which will not necessarily be understood by all, will certainly be challenging to implement for many, but which will make all the difference if we succeed.

I have been a school leader for nearly two decades and I have written about leadership from many different perspectives. But as I approach my twilight years in leadership, *Ferocious Warmth* has inspired me to do better, to be better – to be more courageous, to better balance my tendency to use my head by paying greater attention to what my heart is saying. As I have already done while reading the book, I will be sure to use the questions to reflect on my practice and to try the strategies outlined with staff. Though the ideas in the book are theoretically based, it is above all a book for practitioners. A book for you and me to build our skills so that we can more gracefully blend ferocity and warmth in the dance of a Ferocious Warmth leader.

Ngā mihi nui ki a koutou

THE WORLD NEEDS MORE LEADERS WITH THE FEROCITY TO LEAD TRANSFORMATION,
AND THE WARMTH TO INSPIRE AND CONNECT PEOPLE.
IT NEEDS YOU.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book was written on the land of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation, where I also live. I first and foremost pay my respects to their elders, past, present and emerging. I acknowledge that this beautiful land was never ceded. It always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

Many people have had impact on the development of the Ferocious Warmth concept over the years. Some I have only met briefly, but my Ferocious Warmth senses tingle as I see and hear them in action. Others have shaped my thinking more directly.

My great appreciation to those who willingly were interviewed for this book, or allowed me to share their stories. While many names are mentioned throughout the chapters, there are also a number whose leadership approach, and discussions informed my thinking, even though they are not mentioned by name within the text. Heartfelt thanks to all of you: Professor Judy Atkinson, Vicki Baylis, Sue Bell, Pitsa Binnion, Tracey Breese, Sandy Cartwright, Aderyn Chatterton, Nathan Chisholm, Meagan Cook, Kaye Corcoran, Adriano Di Prato, Jane Gibbs, Philip Hughes, Peter Hutton, Keith Jessup, Maria Karvouni, Dr Stephen Kendall-Jones, Julie Kennedy, Dr Jane Kise, Piet Langstraat, Aine Maher, Justine Mackey, Sarah Martin, Jennifer McCrabb, Claudine Moncur-White, Liz Pringle, Coralee Pratt, Debra Punton, John Richmond, Dr Briony Scott, Associate Professor Elizabeth Sigston, Julie Symons, Professor Helena Teede, Adam Voigt, Dr Barbara Watterson, Penny Weily.

Others have shared their thinking anonymously and are within the chapters with changed names – you know who you are and I thank you for your trust in me with your stories and lessons learned.

My huge gratitude to the people who reviewed the book and gave feedback along the way. Thank you for ‘seeing’ Ferocious Warmth for what it is and the support to get it into the world. Thank you especially to Dr Barbara Watterston

and Dr Lesley Murrehy for providing the foreword and to Sue Bell for providing Ferocious Warmth feedback.

My business would not hold together if not for my business manager Suzie Leyden. Suzie keeps me on track and is committed to this work and our clients in a way that I am so appreciative of.

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Sherrill Knezel of Meaningful Marks has brought the Ferocious Warmth concept to life through her beautiful graphics. I have admired Sherrill's work for many years now and was so excited when she was able to work with me on this project.

To the production team: Ann Bolch my editor, thank you for your perseverance and belief in the concept of Ferocious Warmth. Jaiden Gusti for his graphic design and Lu Sexton for her layout and proofing work. What an awesome team!

To all my clients and those who are in the education field in general. I admire your skills, perseverance and love for the job you do. It is joyful to work in a sector so committed to those who are our future.

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The two most important people in my life: Conor and Layla – so much love for you both. Thank you for always supporting me through everything. You are amazing and unique human beings and I love what you bring to the world. We are an awesome fambam. 'Relax, yeah.'

My mum and dad, Keith and Robyn Jessup, who's love and support I have been blessed to have all my life.

Karin and Adrian White, my anchors. Open 24 hours. No more needs to be said. (xoxo yuk as usual)

Justin, who remains a strong and constant support in all that I do.

My squad: Maree Burgess, Lynne Cazaly, Donna McGeorge. There are peeps in life that elevate you. Your thinking, your connection and your trust in yourself. These three have been all of that to me over many years and I love our 'thing'.

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INTRODUCTION

Ferocious Warmth is firmly and unashamedly a book to celebrate the humanness seen in educational leaders everywhere. The time is ripe for education to transform in all manner of ways. The *Ferocious Warmth* approach creates cultures of learning, connection, thriving and innovation.

In the most complex of times, how do leaders stay balanced to deliver results and transformation yet maintain and grow relationships? How do they involve their people to transform education in a way that inspires and motivates? How can they have expertise in both enacting strategy and building culture. How can these be in concert, rather than in polarity as they often are?

Ferocious Warmth leadership blends the duality of leading for results and leading with compassion. These should not be mutually exclusive but often our more negative experiences of leaders are of one or the other. *Ferocious Warmth* combines outcomes with heart, rigour with connection, high challenge with high support. It's brave and vulnerable, evidence and innovation, cognitive and emotional. The junction of ferocity and warmth is the sweet spot needed to transform the way we work and find even better ways to provide education that is relevant, accessible and fit for purpose amid the swiftest context changes the world has ever seen. A great leader can access all of these and make it look like a dance, blending moves from both ferociousness and warmth. They build strong commitment and trust with those they lead, working in authentic collaboration, not unchallengeable authority. A *Ferocious Warmth* leader connects to the students with an enviable professional intimacy. They push the students in their care to aspire to greater heights, while holding the space for compassion and open conversation.

Unfortunately, the leadership many people experience is far from this. Have you worked with a leader who everyone hides from when they walk down the corridor? One that makes people quake in their boots when they call them into their office for a meeting? On the other extreme, a leader who is so embedded in

the emotional lives of their people that they forget to also focus on what needs to be achieved? They stay too long at the barbecue or at Friday night drinks? One extreme is focussed only on results, the other only on relationships. They both sit at the edges of leadership, yet too often they are the default.

Over the last eighteen months I've interviewed leaders who have led at least one of three significant shifts:

1. Transformed outcomes in the education setting with their teams.
2. Shifted culture over a short period of time.
3. Currently lead dynamic environments that continue to evolve.

I wanted them to describe what's important about leading, about people and about education. In Australia, I've spoken with school leaders from rural, regional and metropolitan state schools, and metropolitan independent and Catholic schools. I've spoken with principals in New Zealand, and system leaders in both Australia and Canada. Each interview was a joy and a privilege. Ferocious Warmth leaders are voracious learners, and so eager to unpack ideas and discuss thinking and beliefs. You'll hear some of their stories through the pages of this book. I have used this case study research as well as academic research to inform and interrogate the Ferocious Warmth leadership approach.

Over the past fifteen years, since leaving the education system in Victoria, Australia, where I was an assistant principal in a primary school, I have worked with leaders to help them reflect and grow their leadership. I've been influenced by great researchers and leaders in the middle of this work and have always sought learning both within and outside the education sector. People who've helped uncover some of the nuances of great leaders, such as Dr Ben Palmer and Professor Con Stough with emotional intelligence, Don Beck and Chris Cowan of Spiral Dynamics, Neuro Linguistic Programming leaders John Grinder and Marvin Oka, as well as Professor Amy Edmondson, Brené Brown, Rita Pierson, Amy Cuddy and many more have all fed into my thinking and reflection on leadership. Education leaders such as Professors Michael Fullan, Andy Hargreaves, Dylan William, John Hattie, Viviane Robinson, Dr Lyn Sharratt and Peter DeWitt and more have helped inform my work and thinking. More recently, Thought Leaders Australia has provided me with an amazing array of people to hang out with. They elevate my thinking and provoke me to delve more deeply

into the elements that help people be their best to make a dent in the universe.

Every year I come across hundreds of school leaders in all education sectors across the country. All of them doing one of the most complex and confounding jobs around. The job of an educational leader constantly mixes joy and challenge, reactivity and proactivity, forward momentum and backward slides. I admire these leaders for their tenacity and intent, and am truly grateful for the trust they put in me to work with them and their teams to create momentum and deep collaboration.

I have always been an observer of leadership. Like a beach comber collecting treasures of shells and beautiful stones along the shore, I've been fascinated to watch the little and big things leaders do in the name of their craft that build strong culture and transforms students' experience of school.

When I look back on my career, I can see that my love for leadership was created way back in my primary and secondary school years, mainly through playing in bands and orchestras as a flute player. I was surrounded by people who encouraged me to put my head up and push myself further, especially when I was coasting on my talent.

I've been lucky enough to work and learn under a number of larger-than-life leaders, even as a student. My Grade 5 teacher, Mr Savage, created a following of musicians who could, by the time we left primary school at the age of 12, play all the recorders from sopranino through descant to the bass recorder, and sight-read complex Baroque and Elizabethan music. Every day before school we gathered to play in a portable full of orchestral marimbas, xylophones and vibraphones that he had purchased for us to use. Doug Heywood, my high school music teacher and university lecturer, still leads the choir at the televised popular Melbourne Carols by Candlelight at the Sidney Myer Music Bowl every Christmas Eve. A group of us still catch up with him a few times a year to reminisce and celebrate his influence on us, forty years on. His impact on music teachers throughout my state of Victoria, Australia, is well known.

Mr John Savage was pretty ferocious (oh the irony!). He was quite scary and yet we still wanted to work like crazy to improve. He tapped into a part of us that straightened our shoulders and got us thinking 'I can do this'. Our standards lifted way above the average musical skills of primary school kids and we were proud of ourselves. So ferociously devoted to performing well, I felt too scared to let Mr

Savage knew before an important concert performance that I was busting to go to the toilet. He was focussed on what we had to do; we were in the stage wings and had to be dead quiet as the group before us finished performing. My need to speak up about the urgency was overpowered by my fear of letting him down and looking silly in front of everyone for not having thought of visiting the toilet earlier. On we went to perform our piece at the Oxfam concert. And on I went to pee my pants, on a stage in front of hundreds of people, as we valiantly played all the way through a Telemann recorder quartet.

Doug was more of a softy. His rapport with the music kids at school was legendary. As with Mr Savage, Doug imparted great knowledge and wisdom, and gave us latitude to develop as individuals. We felt cared for, trusted and respected by him, and gave that back in spades. He cared for us even when it was not his responsibility. After I had sat my Grade 7 flute exam and got an A, Doug said to me, 'Trace, you know you didn't deserve that mark. You didn't do the work.' He was right, of course. My teacher hadn't pushed me or held me to higher account about my slackness when it came to practising and doing my scales. (Urghhhh!) I needed pushing. My internal motivation was very dodgy in some areas and developing more tenacity around the 'boring' stuff is probably something I could have developed with the right guidance and push. (I can guarantee my accountant wishes the same thing!) It wasn't Doug's job to do this as he wasn't my direct flute teacher, but I do wonder what might have happened to my journey if I'd learnt it back then? Maybe I would have got that gold flute my dad promised me if I made it into the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra! I probably wouldn't be here writing this book though. Sliding doors.

Both John and Doug were strong leaders in their own way and both impacted my own leadership approach. My study of leaders has shown me it's possible to combine the two: the ferocity and the warmth. Doug did this in the most endearing manner. His purpose was clear and his expectations were high, while maintaining relationships and really seeing individuals, their strengths and foibles, and still loving them for who they are. Leadership expert and author John Maxwell's 'treat them not as they are but as they could be' is a great example of the Doug-style Ferocious Warmth leader.

Through my teaching career and stints in the automotive and restaurant

sectors, my leaders did amazing things as I watched and experienced their leadership. One of my earliest education leaders moved swiftly from being a new principal, through the education system right up to the CEO of a leadership institute. Another led a national training board. Yet another created a fine-dining restaurant that still delivered exquisite quality for diners some 20 years after opening, and grew a number of Australia's well-known chefs. From all of my leaders I discovered gems about leadership, and some strong messages of what not to do as well...

When I presented a wise and esteemed principal of many years with some concepts, she advised me: 'Never forget, Tracey, that I am an English teacher at heart. Give me practical, actionable tips that I can take away and try that will make my leadership better, just like I would give practical feedback advice to a student essay.' Other leaders like a more theoretical exploration of the challenges and concepts, drawing from journal articles and research to guide their learning. Common feedback on my first book for education *The Buzz – Creating a Thriving and Collaborative Learning Culture* is around its practical nature and the way research is drawn from but does not overwhelm the writing. I have strived to keep that balance here.

This book uncovers the patterns of thinking, beliefs and approaches that Ferocious Warmth leaders use to lead and remain in balance between the two. Not bounce between extremes – too harsh or too soft, too analytical or too emotional. It highlights the challenges of being out of balance and the impact this can have on ourselves and others. Throughout the book there are reflection opportunities, where I encourage you to put the book down to consider the concept being discussed. This is also a time to identify the thinking, beliefs and approaches that you put out to the world.

I hope this book gives you an opportunity to celebrate the skills you already possess and builds new ways to step into the equilibrium of the Ferocious Warmth leader. Many people have lent their thinking and insights to the development of the Ferocious Warmth concept over a number of years. I've observed some in action in their 'native habitat' (I do feel like Sir David Attenborough sometimes) and interviewed about leadership and life.

I am incredibly grateful to every leader and others for allowing me to test my theories and willingly delve into the whys and hows of their thinking, feeling and

behaviours. Some of these people are found in the stories of this book, others greatly impacted the conceptualisation of this approach, even though their name may not appear through the text. I thank you all for your wisdom and openness and for being my guinea pigs!

chapter one

THE WORLD NEEDS MORE COURAGEOUS AND CARING LEADERSHIP

Leaders who can balance results and relationships are needed now more than ever. The stakes are high. Quality wellbeing and learning outcomes for students, educators and support staff, schools and systems, not to mention leaders themselves is becoming more complex. High levels of mental health issues and disengagement are changing the dynamics of classrooms and the role of the teacher. The democratisation of knowledge and increased learning occurring outside the classroom via technology, mounts pressure on teaching and learning within the school system to remain relevant and engaging. Education is at a time of immense and needed change. It takes both courage to address these wicked problems, as well as deep understanding of how humans work and what we need to thrive in change. Creating this change as a collective is critical to dealing with our most pressing challenges:

- Up to 40% of our students are disengaged in learning.¹
- Youth mental health issues are continuing to rise, as is youth suicide.²
- Disadvantaged students are more likely to experience inequity in educational opportunities and outcomes.³
- Youth unemployment is at the highest rate in twenty years.⁴
- Families disenfranchised from school lower student outcomes.⁵

- Lack of student voice and agency increases disengagement in learning.⁶
- Education that helps students thrive now and in the future beyond school requires three types of skills: social and emotional, cognitive and meta-cognitive; practical and physical skills. Fostering these authentically is a challenge for both schools and systems.⁷

As education is essentially about learning and growing, it's ironic that most schools and school systems have not evolved much over the last 150 years. The move to remote learning during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic has seen the biggest radical shift in education delivery since schooling began. Some schools found it a perfect opportunity to learn new ways of working and connecting with students, the community adapting as they learnt about what worked and what didn't. The audacious shift of education to deal with the context was exciting to witness, as it showed just how adaptable and responsive educators can be.

I am privileged to be exposed to many leaders and teachers who are continually evolving learning and teaching. They are pushing against 'the way we've always done it' to grow strong learning cultures that are not prepared to accept the status quo. They are true learners in partnership with their students, co-constructing a teaching and learning environment responsive to the Imagination Age, the age of entrepreneurial opportunity and a democratisation of knowledge. They are ferocious about this purpose, and have the warmth and belief in people to create a movement towards a different paradigm. You'll find some of these leaders and teachers within the pages of this book. Yet there are many more out there who are, together, fuelling a movement to provide education that not only helps our young people gain the skills and attitudes they need for a fulfilling life in a complex world, but also experience joyful, connected relationships and learning along the way. They are courageously pushing against the comfort zone in a way that compels others to join. I call them Ferocious Warmth leaders.

Ferocious Warmth leaders help those around them lift the quality of daily interactions in schools to transform education. Ferocious Warmth leaders aim to eradicate mediocrity. Beige thinking and relationships do not sit well with Ferocious Warmth leaders.

How do you spot mediocrity? Researchers in the Netherlands used the term

'mentality of mediocrity' when identifying factors in higher education students described as 'strategically exerting the minimum effort necessary to get passing grades.'⁸ This was found to be a strategy utilised by students to get the grades good enough to get through, perhaps reducing cognitive dissonance, and not an indicator of their abilities, or their learning regulation. It also showed that the students used this approach strategically depending on the perceived importance of the task. If you put the lens over your school, can you sense a 'mentality of mediocrity' where you don't believe it's appropriate? Are there educators that accept mediocrity for their teaching practice? Do too many of your students aim for 'just good enough'?

The word mediocrity doesn't fit the purpose of schools. It doesn't serve education or quality relationships. Ferocious Warmth is about rejecting cognitive or emotional 'average'. Cognitive and emotional mediocrity won't help us deal with the big challenges we face.

Cognitive mediocrity is feeling comfort with the status quo: happy with the strategy and thinking that keeps us stagnant or, at the very least, only just keeping up with what society needs from us, rather than leading the education directions that respond to a changing world. In this realm we are OK with underperformance or teachers who don't really want to be there, content to keep doing things the way we've always done.

Emotional mediocrity is being satisfied with low levels of trust and empathy in our cultures, punitive management of behaviours and poor adult performance. It's leadership that gets results via emotional negligence or emotional manipulation. It creates an environment where the professional relationships are parent/child-like rather than adult to adult. Relationships between students and teachers are aloof, disconnected and based on content rather than learning.

To get to extraordinary in both emotional and cognitive approach, you need both courage to lift the bar and care to support a culture of wellbeing.

WHAT IS YOUR EXTRAORDINARY?

As a leader, what would you do if you and your team were bolder? What is your vision? What transformation, shift of the status quo or rise above mediocrity are you leading? Is it teaching and learning or relationships and culture? Perhaps it's all of these? Is it building professional trust to learn more from each other or

implementing a new approach to literacy or numeracy? Or perhaps it's time to innovate into the next phase of 21st century learning? What big picture impact do you want for your students? What do your students want for their learning?

WHAT IS EXTRAORDINARY FOR YOUR SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY? WHETHER IT'S A SMALL EVOLUTION OR A LARGE REVOLUTION. FEROCIOUS WARMTH PROVIDES THE BALANCE YOU NEED TO HAVE THE COURAGE FOR CHANGE AND THE PROFESSIONAL TRUST TO ENABLE THE MOVEMENT.

If you haven't thought much about your 'extraordinary', I encourage you to imagine where you would take your school with the momentum, strategy and commitment to get there? What are you ferocious about? Committed to? How can you co-create this vision with your community? Have you the trust and relationships to get there? Do people see both conviction and connection as your strengths? Are you ferocious and warm?

LOOKING WITHIN

Leadership is messy. School leadership is especially so. Everyday there are myriad cross relationships and interactions that go on in classrooms, staff rooms, corridors and playgrounds. Leading in the messy middle is hard work, constantly pulling us in one direction or another. Our ability to lead with balance and calmness can be a daily challenge. Yet many of us walk through the world totally unconscious of the affect our leadership has on others.

While self-awareness is usually first on the agenda for many leadership programs, these often do not go deep enough, failing to open our eyes to the internal drivers of our underpinning, often unconscious beliefs.

Leadership is about a way of being, not doing. It's nebulous, nuanced and elusive. It is as much to do with feeling and energy as thinking and planning. It's contextual and responsive, and can never be one size fits all.

When you meet a Ferocious Warmth leader you know it. You feel the vibe. When I share the Ferocious Warmth approach with others, many can immediately name one or two leaders who fill the criteria outlined in this book. These leaders have built more leaders through an environment characterised by high challenge and high support. They have brought together community and school, mended

broken trust and lifted outcomes for students. They've instilled hope and joy in those they lead and created a collaborative culture that fronts up to the hard conversations. Ferocious Warmth leaders also have a Ferocious Warmth leadership team. If they move into a school without one, building leadership capacity in others is one of their first strategies.

Yet, too often more people have experienced leaders who've led in an unbalanced and uncentered way, focussed too much on results or too much on relationships. This is not useful to anyone. One is a win-at-all-costs approach, the other usually entails indecisive direction and a greater focus on the welfare and relationships of the teachers over the good of the students.

Leanne was a deputy principal in a primary school. She often felt caught in the vortex of having to play the other half to her principal. Leanne's principal was a person with strong compassion for others who listened deeply to what others thought. Unfortunately, though, when inappropriate staff behaviours occurred, Leanne was called in to deal with it. This became a good cop/bad cop exercise that no one won. Highly stressed by this, Leanne felt her principal was not standing up for what she believed. In private to Leanne, the principal would acknowledge what she thought the teacher should do, but not say it directly. This was left up to Leanne, while the principal herself made overtly empathetic acts to the teacher without mentioning the actual issue. Apart from an unfair responsibility on Leanne to hold the person to account, this also created a habit of leadership that expected one person to be responsible for accountability and the tougher conversations.

Others have the opposite situation. Joe was a fearsome leader who was so focussed on data and student outcomes that he badly affected morale and staff engagement. Joe was acting principal at a school that had focussed clearly on their professional culture, and teaching and learning practice. During the two years prior to Joe's arrival, there'd been a positive shift in attitudes to school, collaborative culture and consistent pedagogy. But over a six-month period, it seemed as if a systematic destruction of the work they'd done took place. After actively building professional trust and breaking down silos with the previous principal, this leader rarely had the staff meet together. There was a divide and conquer approach. People no longer felt safe to open their mouths. Unbelievably, one person was terminated in front of others. Implausible, but true. The acting principal continued

on, obsessing over results and displaying abysmal emotional intelligence, while staff morale went from 98% the previous year to 48%. When the principal returned, she had to lead the rebuilding. Fortunately, she is a Ferocious Warmth leader.

FOCUSSING ONLY ON RESULTS

Leading a results-at-all-costs culture at the expense of support and empathy ends in cultural and wellbeing demise. How do we inspire our people for the stretch that transformational work requires while providing the safety nets to thrive and grow? More broadly: how do educational leaders ensure we zero in on results that matter, wider than the narrow definitions the media and bureaucracy encourage the community to focus on?

There is incredible pressure on school leadership to lead a school that performs. As it should. No one wants to send their children to a school with unskilled educators or who don't care about student wellbeing. Unfortunately, our measurement systems are geared to a narrow concept of success, characterised by a snapshot assessment of literacy and numeracy in the form of standardised testing leading to the pointy end of a university entrance score only useful for a small percentage of university courses. While many schools believe that this one-eyed focus is in no small measure killing the major purpose of education, and needs to change, it is still the predominant way schools and student learning are assessed.

When schools are structured around control, standardisation and compliance, among the first things to lose are trusting, meaningful relationships.'

*Michael Wehmeyer, Yong Zhao, 'Teaching Students to Become Self Determined Learners'*⁹

When we focus too much on the standard results of targets and well-worn standards of achievement levels, we stay firmly stuck in the old paradigm of education, which is out of date and not relevant. From a human leadership point of view, we lose the heart and soul of education: students who thrive and contribute in a complex and challenging world. Not just in the future, but now. We need Ferocious Warmth leaders at a system level and a school level for the shift to happen in earnest, from policy to implementation.

FOCUSSING ONLY ON RELATIONSHIPS

Yet we also have leaders who maintain goodwill and harmony over the need for robust dialogue, hard decisions and shift. This is a tricky position. In some cases, I've worked with leaders unaware that their 'trusting' relationships were stopping the school moving forward. They were stuck, not wanting to speak their truth to people for fear of causing a massive blow up or a passive-aggressive reaction of snide comments and being 'frozen out'. The personal trust did not create the environment of rigorous conversations. This can lead to complacency, avoidance and a 'digging in' when true transformation is required to achieve results. Open discussion and lifting the bar is seen as conflict, even unfair.

We end up with The Spoilt Brat Syndrome – high levels of support expected but low levels of challenge accepted. In some schools, the time, resources and support teachers get is incredibly generous, yet the expectations for growth and continued transformation are low. Then watch the fast and furious push back when expectations are raised by internal change, the system or the community.

THE GOLDBLOCKS OPTION

The conflict of courageous and compassionate leadership – stay a course of action or back away – is real. As is the overwhelming pressure on educational leaders to be all things to all people. Every day brings the need for swift and brave decision-making while leading strategic shift, coupled with deep empathy to ensure the wellbeing of our people. The not-too-tough, not-too-kind but just right approach.

I recently coached a senior executive within a large education system. She is well respected by her peers and those she leads. Yet she felt that around the executive table she needed more courage to speak with conviction about the skills she brought to the table. Her strengths lay on the 'warm' side – deep listening, empathy, emotional awareness. While her senior colleagues are open and respectful in lateral relationships, she feels that her executive colleagues are cold, aloof and hierarchical with those they lead. She believes they're not getting the best out of everyone, due to a lack of empathy, collaboration and collective orientation. Staff survey results support her concern. Here is her challenge: to influence her executive peers to see that the warmth side of leadership is just as important as ferocity.

Do you see both sides as critical? Or do you think that the warmth of leadership is just 'soft and fluffy'?

Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister of New Zealand leading during one of the most challenging global and local periods, is a well-known example of these two characteristics. Leading with compassion through earthquakes, volcano eruptions, terrorist attacks and a global pandemic, people were quick to try to put Ardern in a box that she was too soft to lead well. Her response to a question on leadership on the US Today Show¹⁰ on NBC in September 2018 went viral:

'I really rebel against this idea that politics has to be a place full of ego and where you're constantly focused on scoring hits against one another. Yes, we need a robust democracy, but you can be strong, and you can be kind.'

Leadership requires us to pull from our strengths, values and contextualise these in the moment. It is this adaptive ability that helps Ferocious Warmth leaders do the dance between ferocity and warmth. The concept has been captured in such approaches as adaptive leadership and transformational leadership. Ronald Heifetz and his colleagues argue in the book *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, that adaptive leadership is a practice not a theory, defining it as the 'practice of mobilising people to tackle tough challenges and thrive'¹¹ The same is true for Ferocious Warmth. Mediocrity and status quo are the antithesis of this type of leadership. Action makes all the difference.

Our general leadership history is one of logic, cognition and technical skill, focussing on results at the expense of the people doing the work or receiving the service. It's a more 'masculine' energy view of leadership that minimises empathy, feelings and connection. A top-down hierarchical structure where our 'level' within an organisation defined our voice and value. You could fill a library with books written about leadership full of war stories and leadership lessons glorifying hero leadership and a 'command and control' approach. To make it as a leader, competition, sabotage and a dog-eat-dog climb to the top. This may seem overly emotive, yet walk into many organisations in the legal, financial or medical sectors and you will see this type of culture alive and well. The research clearly shows that amid this predominant style, disengagement, mental health issues and low morale are rife.

The last twenty years has seen research delve further into the impact of the

concepts of trust, empathy, warmth and joy in the workplace. Neuroscience and the use of fMRIs (functional medical radio imaging) is unearthing more connections that show that these things impact the neural pathways our brains use and the engagement of the more evolved part of the brain, the prefrontal cortex. The connection and interaction of the prefrontal cortex and the limbic brain is impacted by a huge variety of factors, such as context, trauma, environment and connection. We will explore these findings further in the book as we explore the elements of Ferocious Warmth.

THE IMPACT OF THE EXTREMES

Through the COVID-19 lock down in March 2020, I had the privilege of working with a number of leadership groups as they steadied themselves through the rollercoaster of each week, each day. The stories of how they, with their teams, made swift and massive shifts come with inspiring examples of leaders connecting, supporting and leading strategically. Educators led the way with this 'pivot', moving to online learning in a matter of weeks. The whole of society learnt so much about how we individually deal with immense pressure and the need for quick action and 'building the plane as it's flying'. Not all leadership stories are like this.

As restrictions eased in my home state, I grabbed the chance to hang out with a couple of my friends. We shared stories of what was happening in our lives and I heard two very different leadership tales.

One of my friends works in a health network, with thousands of workers on the front line of COVID-19. They were swiftly mobilised to be ready, armed for pandemic proportion health impacts if needed, as well as creating a safe and functioning workforce. The other friend works in a small company that supports businesses, which has a workforce of around 50 across a large geographical distance.

Here are the two scenarios (summarised and in no particular order). Can you guess which is which?

SCENARIO 1

1. No acknowledgement from leaders as to the challenges people are dealing with at home, including children at home learning, compromised immune systems and general stress and anxiety.

2. Little interaction from senior management in how to deal with the challenges of the new situation.
3. No external display of support and compassion for the tough times experienced by either the team or the clients.
4. A requirement that all normally expected KPIs (key performance indicators) would be met during this time.
5. No regular check-ins or connection from the senior leader to team members on a personal level.
6. No special professional learning put in place to help people cope more effectively.

How does my friend feel? Disconnected, unseen, undervalued, burnt out, angry, untrusted and untrusting.

Leadership approach: we've got work to do. I don't care about the pain you might be in – get on with it. That's the very extreme of ferocity – it's fearsome.

SCENARIO 2

1. Planning from the outset as to how the pandemic would affect those they serve and the workers.
2. Twice weekly online forums with an open invitation to all.
3. Executive present at both forums to answer questions.
4. Feedback loops so that unanswered questions are responded to.
5. Next-level leaders maintaining high levels of communication with their teams.

How does my friend feel? Connected, heard, in the loop, valued, able to contribute, committed, understanding and understood.

Leadership approach: we've got work to do so let's do it together. That's Ferocious Warmth.

Scenario 1 is the smaller organisation. It could be easy to assume that the smaller the organisation, the greater the compassion, support and connection people would feel from the leadership team. The easier the direct contact should be, the greater insight into personal situations. It is distressing to see a friend who I know gives her all to her clients and works hard, feeling so disheartened and stressed.

In scenario 2, the executive led the complex organisation with positivity and

appreciation, transparency and accessibility through the most major crisis to hit us in a couple of generations. Did they get it right all the time? Probably not, and hopefully they'd see any missteps (trials, pilots, experiments) as learning, acknowledge it and shift to try another tack. Agility and flexibility have, at their roots, a deep learning foundation, one that takes on continuous feedback and shifts to respond. This was uncharted territory. We needed leaders willing to let us sail into new waters and test out what works.

The other? Well, I'm wondering what was happening for the leadership of that business. As leaders, our role is to support our people to be their best, not beat them into the ground with a results-at-all-cost approach, especially in times of extreme crisis challenging every person one way or another. While tough decisions need to be made at this time, in this case there seems to be little thought about the support people need from their leaders to manage as best they can.

Do you have the balance of Ferocious Warmth to be able to get people there? We need ferocity to even contemplate our aspirations and turn them into action. But more than ever we also need warmth to authentically convey: I care for you as people and I'm here by your side every step of the way.

chapter two

FEROCIOUS WARMTH

I want to share with you the elation I feel when I discover a Ferocious Warmth leader. I can spot them from a hundred paces. I can feel their passion through the newsletters and videos on the school websites before I even meet them. I can hear it in the language they use as we speak via email, over the phone or virtually. I experience the connection they have with their students and staff as we walk through the school. I hear the belief and love they hold for those they serve expressed in their words. I can feel the psychological safety in place for people to raise and discuss ideas, differences of opinion and share personal challenges with them. I feel the sense of trust, fun and hard work that goes on in the halls and rooms of the school. I see them reflect with deep self-awareness on their own growth. I see the transformation they are leading within their community, how they lift expectations and build momentum to achieve the results and changes required. I hear the reputation they have within their collegiate networks. I see people walk away from working with these leaders just that little bit taller, ready to make their own ripples on the world.

Let's look at the two sides of Ferocious Warmth. Great leadership never uses them in isolation. The strengths come from both sides.

FEROCIOUS

There is a fierce congruence in this side of Ferocious Warmth leaders. They are focussed on their clear purpose of providing high-quality education for their

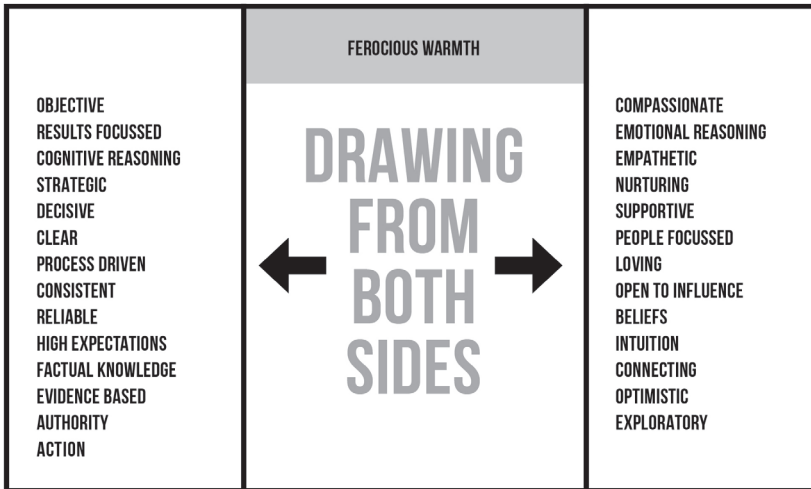
students and courageous in making hard decisions along the way. They are strong advocates for their students, staff and their community. Most importantly, they challenge assumptions on how we 'do' education, whether it be shifting the structures, innovating practice or lifting out of complacency or mediocrity. They are fierce in their belief that education, as traditionally provided, needs to evolve. In some circumstances, these leaders are leading system revolution not just evolution.

WARMTH

Ferocious Warmth leaders work with compassion as a base for all relationships, regardless of who. From the student in the yard to the teacher in the classroom to the parent in the corridor, people feel connected to these leaders. People know they have their back in good times and in challenging circumstances. These leaders genuinely love people. I never hear them speaking anything other than constructive and positive comments about their staff, students and parents. Even those causing them stress and taking a lot of energy are treated with empathy and a real belief in the growth and positive intent of that person. Don't get me wrong, the leader still needs to debrief and sometimes gets blindsided by the behaviours of others. But the way they handle it comes from a position of compassion, not anger.

When we're at our best, ferocity and warmth, courage and vulnerability, results and relationships, head and hearts, need not be polarities, but nest inside each other. They support each other in every decision we make. If we are focussed on strategically achieving our purpose, and constantly building our emotional intelligence to understand how to best serve our people, they go together hand in glove. Our challenge is staying in balance when the going gets tough and ensuring the blend is right.

Figure 1. Ferocious Warmth – Drawing from Both Sides



BE THE BLEND

As I was blogging about the emerging concept of Ferocious Warmth, an assistant principal emailed me describing her principal:

‘I am wanting to “dob in” my Principal. She is definitely the Ferocious Warmth leader you are talking about. That person who stands out amongst all leaders.

In Term 4 of last year, she was appointed Principal and I was appointed Assistant Principal. At the beginning of this year, two more Assistant Principals and two more Learning Specialists were appointed. As you can imagine establishing trust with a brand new leadership team is a difficult thing to do but this was made particularly difficult given the history of the school where four years ago some of our staff members were subjected to trauma at the hands of a previous leadership team. The ripples of this can still be felt.

Ellen has that magic mix of warmth and ferocity and it is quite amazing to watch. She treats everyone with respect and connects with them on both a personal and professional level. She speaks kindly to all members of the community from the Foundation child to the difficult parent. She also gets things done – quickly, efficiently and will leave no stone unturned when there is

an issue that needs to be resolved. I love listening to some of the most crucial conversations that have the ability to leave people feeling slighted or offside, but she turns them around so that people are prepared to work for the greater good. Although it is taking time, you can definitely feel the beginnings of a cultural shift in our school community.'

What a beautiful example of the leader who knows that the recipe is not the 'head' or the 'heart', but a *blend* of these. Knowing when to lift the bar, knowing when to deeply listen and hold the space. This is the magic of the Ferocious Warmth leader. Of the leaders I interviewed, many mentioned the intuitive way they lead. In our discussions, I sought to unpack this intuition and create some frameworks that underpin the approach, which we explore throughout the chapters.

All of these leaders deeply believe that relationships are the critical piece to develop. This certainly doesn't mean they ignore getting the work done. The work is their driving purpose. But they share the need to get beyond the 'technical' descriptions of leadership and into 'feeling' – the empathy, connection and humanness of leading. A sense of being that is deeply connected to those around.

TO BE, NOT TO DO

Research into leadership beyond what to 'do' towards how to 'be' in education is somewhat limited. It can seem intangible and elusive – something science can find hard to pin down. Discussions about characteristics, personal effectiveness and culture can be presented in rather unfriendly and hard-to-access language. One of the many things I admire about global education leader Professor Michael Fullan is his ability to write in a way that captures our heads and our hearts, while drawing on the evidence base. His 'sticky messages' come through in both his writing and presenting. Artful curation of academic leadership research, accessible and practical is a wonderful gift for time poor school leaders. The late Sir Ken Robinson influenced so many of us as educators in his life-long crusade against boring education fitting a 19th century paradigm. His message was made more powerful by his storytelling, viral TED talk and the visual animation that accompanied his talk – all making links between theory and practice. I also unashamedly look beyond education to research and application in the areas of neuroleadership,

courage, shame, learning cultures, and emotional and conversational intelligence. People such as Professor Amy Edmondson, Judith E. Glaser, Brené Brown, Amy Cuddy, David Rock and Daniel Goleman have all straddled the difficult chasm of translating research around leadership ‘being’ into practical, accessible approaches.

Our leadership learning should never end. In the thousands of leaders I have met and worked with over the years, the most inspiring leaders are those who are explicitly still learning their craft. Still making mistakes, trying new things, reflecting and adjusting. They are the true embodiment of Fullan’s ‘lead learner’ label. Not leading learner from the stance of an expert, but a co-learner. Always reflecting, learning, expanding.

Some leadership approaches suggest your leadership teams should contain people who ‘balance you out’, once you learn your ‘leadership style’ during a leadership program. To me this totally misses the point of leadership development.

SCHOOL LEADERS WHO ARE LEAD LEARNERS SEEK TO FIND AND DEVELOP THE LEADERSHIP THAT CREATES THE MOST IMPACT AND TRANSFORMATION.

Therefore, our task is to keep learning what makes the best leadership in education, schools and systems at any given time, and build that capability. But the intricacy and duality of many of the leadership tensions people face every day, sometimes a number of times an hour, is not prescriptive. Nor is it an easy formula.

The answer lies in the Ferocious Warmth approach.

THE KEY PIECES OF THE FEROCIOUS WARMTH FORMULA

- The Infinity Symbol – a visual that brings the concept to life.
- Three Intelligences – areas of thinking and skill development that, when blended, form Ferocious Warmth leadership and create buy in, continuous improvement and potential.
- Four Elements – underpinning ways of being that serve as the foundation of Ferocious Warmth leaders.

THE INFINITY SYMBOL

If you were to visualise Ferocious Warmth as an image, what would it be? The words are a metaphor in themselves. They evoke the lioness, holding her cub in her mouth protecting it from prey, while at the same time pushing the cub to take a risk by standing on its own paws. I recently saw a video of a giraffe being born. As it lay on the ground, seemingly not breathing, the mother stood next to it, licking it and pushing it until the baby took a breath. Within a few minutes, the mother was nudging the baby to get up on its legs. It stumbled and fell over. Again, the mother pushed. The baby managed to move towards its mother, hoping to take refuge against the mother's legs. The mother shoved it away until it got the idea and moved by itself. Cruel? No of course not. It's the only way the baby giraffe will survive in the wild. The mother was there protecting and pushing. Stretch and safety. Ferocity and warmth.

The infinity symbol defines the constant push and pull that leadership requires. It also suggests the duality and paradox of drawing from ways of thinking and feeling that seem diametrically opposed – courageous yet vulnerable, strategic yet people centred. It invokes the flow of the Yin and the Yang, the masculine and the feminine.

Figure 2. Ferocious Warmth Symbol



The power of this symbol sits in the centre, the overlap, where we stand with conviction, balanced with both sides at play. We draw in energy from both sides to create a leadership approach that is adaptable and responsive.

'In the past, I felt I ran the infinity laps. Now I feel I stand in the middle leaning left then right. Then a new day starts and I do it again – breathe, balance and believe.'

Ainslie Peszynski, Regional Leading Teacher

When I speak about the Ferocious Warmth symbol, I cannot help but move my body from side to side in a rhythmic flow drawing from left and right, visualising the internal dance great leaders make as they go about their work.

“ THE DANCE IS CONSTANT IN THE FEROCIOUS WARMTH LEADER. THEY ARE NOT STAGNANT OR STILL. ALWAYS MOVING WITHIN THE CONTEXT, BUT ALIGNED TO THEIR VALUES AND PRINCIPLES. ”

Imagine Mr Miyagi in Karate Kid teaching his student how to 'wax on and wax off'. Poised, focussed, committed.

THE THREE INTELLIGENCES OF FEROCIOUS WARMTH LEADERS

Woven through the chapters of this book are areas of skill that pull from three intelligences, which, when used together, create the platform for the Ferocious Warmth leader. These intelligences focus on three areas: the people – emotional intelligence, the purpose and plan – strategic intelligence, and building the potential of all – learning intelligence. Below I list some examples of characteristics of each.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE — THE PEOPLE:

- Managing self and others
- Buy in and commitment
- Self-compassion and empathy
- Values and ways of being
- Building and connecting community
- Emotional reasoning.

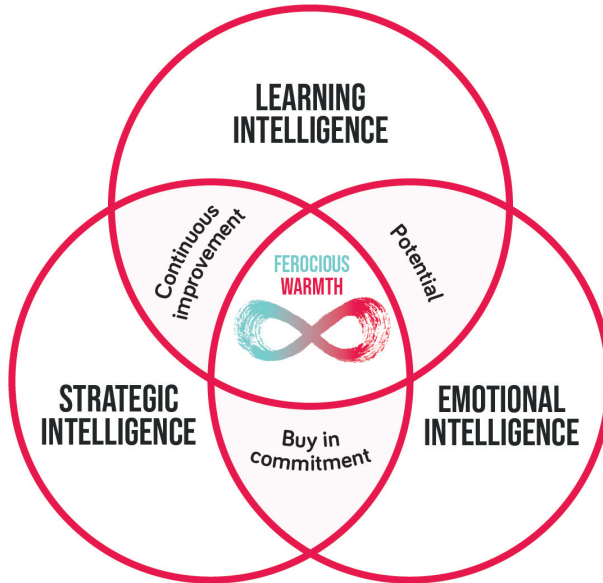
STRATEGIC INTELLIGENCE — THE PURPOSE AND PLAN:

- Systems thinking
- Vision
- Purpose
- Strategy
- Mental models
- Goal clarification
- Prioritising
- Resourcing
- Action.

LEARNING INTELLIGENCE — THE POTENTIAL OF ALL:

- Growing a professional learning community
- Leader as learner
- Collaboration and collective efficacy
- Innovation
- Agility and flexibility
- Conversations that matter.

Figure 3. The Three Intelligences of Ferocious Warmth



EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE — THE PEOPLE

In 2007, I was accredited in the emotional intelligence tool created by Professor Con Stough and Dr Ben Palmer – the Swinburne University Emotional Intelligence Tool, now known as the Genos tool and used globally to build emotional intelligence in workplaces. I've always found their first definition of emotional intelligence one of the most accessible and concise explanations of the term:

Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to perceive, understand and manage emotions in self and others. ¹²

Ferocious warmth is deeply steeped in emotional intelligence. Our emotional awareness of others gives us the insights to shift our leadership to meet the needs of those we lead. It also reminds us to focus on self-care and compassion. The skill of emotional self-awareness is step number one for all leaders. Starting with self is the step towards growth.

'It's not always easy to reckon with our own and others' emotional lives. But when kids and adults are given the permission to feel all emotions,

*and learn how to manage them, it opens doors to collaboration, relationship building, improved decision-making and performance, and greater wellbeing. Almost all the essential ingredients for success arise from emotion skills.'*¹³

Professor Marc Brackett's book *Permission to Feel: Unlock the Power of Emotions to Help Our Kids, Ourselves, and Our Society to Thrive* offers five key emotion skills:

- I am able to accurately recognise my own and others' emotions
- I am aware of the causes and consequences of my own and others' feelings
- I have a refined emotion vocabulary
- I am skilled at expressing the full range of emotions
- I am skilled at managing my own emotions and at helping others manage theirs.

The Ferocious Warmth themes of perception, understanding and managing emotions come through these statements. Professor Brackett shares the experience of running an intensive for a school district. The course included a principal initially resistant to the concepts. By the end of the course the same principal, when asked what he thought now about emotions and integrating emotional skills into his school, answered: 'I realise now that I didn't know what I didn't know. The language of feelings was foreign to me. So, thank you for giving me permission to feel.' This is a school leader stepping into the warmth side of his leadership with more mindfulness.

If you know that integrating feelings into the way you lead and work in the world is a challenge, keep an eye out for the emotional intelligence woven throughout the stories and thinking in this book. Being able to bring these into your leadership is the main intelligence that will help centre you in your Ferocious Warmth. The four elements of Ferocious Warmth – expansion, connection, courage and authenticity – are full of emotional-intelligence skills. Like the delicious Italian dessert tiramisu, layered sponge cake soaked in coffee and marsala, all of these elements are soaked in emotional intelligence. It's learnable and makes a greater difference to leadership outcomes than IQ.

There are many excellent resources available to help build these emotional intelligence skills, such as Professor Brackett's book *Permission to Feel*. Daniel

Goleman's *The New Leaders* was one of the first leadership books that gave an accessible and practical overview of emotional intelligence in action. A book I highly recommend is *Step In, Step Up* by Jane A.G. Kise and Barbara K. Watterston.¹⁴ Kise and Watterston are highly experienced educators and leadership development experts. The book is full of insightful activities to build your emotional intelligence. It's written for women in education leadership, but the theory, application and activities are applicable to all.

STRATEGIC INTELLIGENCE — THE PURPOSE AND THE PLAN

Do you know the people in your school with a strategic mind? Those who can rise above the details to see the key questions to ask, the major strategies to address? Many school teams suffer from confusion and burn out due to the lack of focus on thinking strategically about where to leverage and effect change. A leader with strategic intelligence forges a path that sets out the stepping stones to our vision. Strategic intelligence connects the what to the how to the why. We don't get far if we don't have a purpose and a plan or if we can't connect the work we're doing to a strong why that goes far beyond 'to improve student outcomes'. This is an outcome, not a purpose for education. Strategic intelligence takes us from the high-level vision to the action to get there. It takes in the resourcing needed, clarifies the goals and shapes the future.

Strategic intelligence is also understanding the mental models we use to view the world. Often these mental models are totally unconscious. Peter Senge is a global expert on systems thinking and organisational strategy. His book *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*¹⁵ is one of the most influential strategic culture books ever published. He believes that mental models are one of the key definers of strong organisational culture, summarised below:

'Differences between mental models explain why two people can observe the same event and describe it differently; they are paying attention to different details. But because mental models are usually tacit, existing below the level of awareness, they are often untested and unexamined. They are generally invisible to us – until we look for them. The core of this discipline is bringing mental models to the surface, to explore and talk about them with minimal defensiveness – to help us see the pane of glass, see its impact on our

lives, and find ways to re-form the glass by creating better mental models that serve us better in the world.'

Ferocious Warmth leaders seek to unpack their 'models of the world' and shape their thinking and approaches strategically. We are surrounded by mental models that have shaped our world. Recently I talked with a school principal who'd gone through a leadership program I ran over a decade ago. She told me that some of the mental models we explored through that program were still her 'go to' models when she needed to do some deep thinking. Models such as Argyris' Ladder of Inference, Heifetz and Linksy's Balcony and Dancefloor, and the Johari window by Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham. Some of these models are over 50 years old, yet they stand the test of time for smart leaders.

LEARNING INTELLIGENCE — THE POTENTIAL OF ALL

The last intelligence is the intelligence of growth, for both the individual and the organisation. It's the ability to be a learner and create a learning culture for those we lead. Learning intelligence has three levels – self, team and school. At a team and school level this learning intelligence is what I call The Buzz. It is the essence of a strong collaborative professional learning culture. My first book *The Buzz – Creating a Thriving & Collaborative Learning Culture* was dedicated to unpacking the three pillars of The Buzz – mindset, environment and authentic dialogue. It focussed on three levels for an effective learning culture:

*'Learning intelligence needs to be evident at three levels for a school to create a truly thriving professional learning culture. These three levels are like the layers of an onion. In the centre is the individual. The strength of learning intelligence in each individual member affects the quality of the outer layers. The middle layer represents all the teams within the school structure and the way they work together. The outer layer is the school unit as a complete, thriving learning organisation. If one of these levels is not pulling its weight in regard to learning, the outcomes are not as strong.'*¹⁶

SELF

Leaders with a strong learning intelligence thrive on being out of the comfort zone and in the learning zone. They are voracious learners. The Ferocious Warmth

approach to learning is one that is antifragile, instead of being resilient with change and arming ourselves against what might happen, Ferocious Warmth leaders face the oncoming storm and yell 'bring it on', revelling in the challenge and the opportunities to innovate, shift to get better outcomes and continually evolve.

Nassim Taleb defines antifragility as:

*'Some things benefit from shocks; they thrive and grow when exposed to volatility, randomness, disorder, and stressors, and love adventure, risk, and uncertainty. Yet, in spite of the ubiquity of the phenomenon, there is no word for the exact opposite of fragile. Let us call it antifragile. Antifragility is beyond resilience or robustness. The resilient resists shocks and stays the same; the antifragile gets better.'*¹⁷

Now perhaps we could redefine antifragile with one number: 2020!

Even amidst the challenges and stresses, did you approach the world during 2020 as a learner? With a focus on the opportunities as well as the realities of leading through it? 2020 gave us lived experience of being in the learning zone... were you thriving or just surviving?

TEAM AND SCHOOL

Schools are in the business of learning, yet developing and maintaining a staff culture of learning is a challenge for many schools. The Buzz diagnostic survey has been undertaken by over 8000 educators and 280 schools over the past two years. Using The Buzz pillars of mindset, environment and dialogue, it asks participants to reflect on their own learning and contribution to the learning culture. It also asks them to assess the school's learning culture. The results clearly show that the most difficult part of building learning intelligence is taking the culture of learning to the collective. For schools with a low collaborative learning culture, the difference between how individuals see their own learning skills and how they see the school's is stark. Many see themselves as strong individual learners, but that the team culture is not a collective learning environment. Moving a learning culture from 'I' to 'we' is strategic work, yet it's often left to chance or done at a surface level.

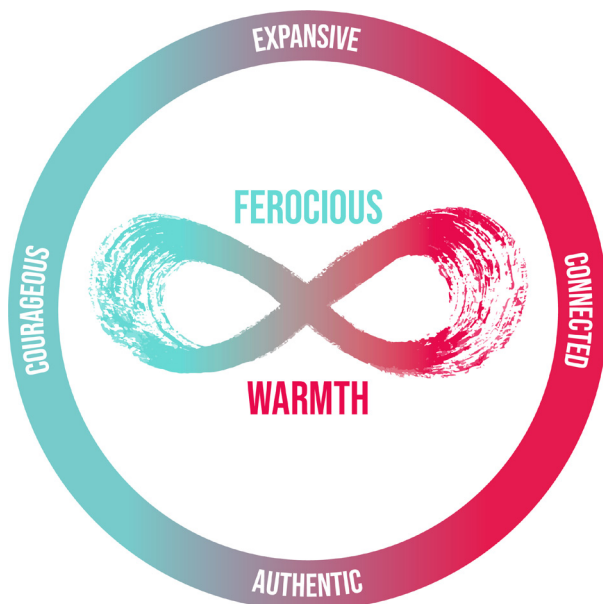
Part of the work of learning intelligence is creating psychological safety, encouraging voice and contribution. We'll discuss this further in the chapters ahead – it is a critical piece of this puzzle. Above all else Ferocious Warmth leaders are

committed to growing their people and themselves. They tap into and encourage the skills and talents of others. James Kouzes and Barry Posner, authors and leadership professors at Leavey School of Business, surveyed thousands of people about the ‘worst’ and ‘best’ leaders they had ever had. They asked ‘what percentage of your talents (skills, ability plus time and energy) would you say each of these leaders brought out?’ They then asked them to give a percentage from 1 to 100. When it came to the worst leaders, the answers ranged from 2% to 40%, with an average of 31%. In contrast, those labelled the ‘best’ leaders brought out between 40% to 100%, with an average of 95%.

‘There’s clearly a difference between people’s worst and best leaders. The best leaders bring out more than three times the amount of talent, energy and motivation from their people compared with their counterparts at the other end of the spectrum.’¹⁸

Emotional, strategic and learning intelligence. These three intelligences work together to support the Ferocious Warmth leader and curate buy in, commitment and continuous improvement.

Figure 4. Ferocious Warmth Leadership



THE ELEMENTS OF FEROCIOUS WARMTH

Through both my work with Ferocious Warmth leaders and interviews during the writing of this book, four clear elements stand out from these great human beings. Though explored more deeply in the chapters beyond, through some Ferocious Warmth exemplars, the essence of these elements is:

EXPANSIVE

I am open to evolving my thinking, to disruption and innovation. I love learning with others and co-creating future pathways. I challenge my own thinking and other's. I see the world with optimism and possibility. I build collaborative learning cultures with others. I have high levels of self-awareness.

CONNECTED

I have a love for others. I believe and love the work I do and the people I work with. I approach people, no matter their circumstances, with a belief in their positive intent and inherent worth. I believe all people deserve kindness, compassion and empathy.

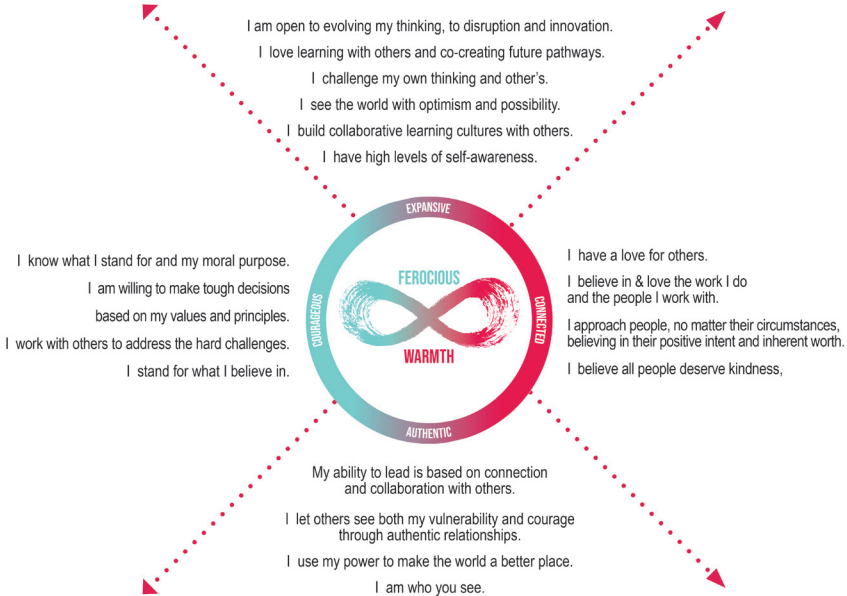
COURAGEOUS

I know what I stand for and my moral purpose. I am willing to make tough decisions based on my values and principles. I work with my people to address the hard challenges. I stand for what I believe in.

AUTHENTIC

My ability to lead is based on connection and collaboration with others. I let others see both my vulnerability and courage through authentic relationships. I use power to make the world a better place. I am who you see.

Figure 5. Ferocious Warmth Elements



FEROCIOUS WARMTH IN ACTION

The elements and intelligences of Ferocious Warmth all work in concert, overlapping and informing each other at an almost unconscious level. Here's an example of the Ferocious Warmth approach in action.

Meagan Cook is a school principal I've known for over a decade. In 2017, Meagan moved from being an assistant principal and integral part of a well-connected leadership team, to becoming principal in a K-12 school. A few years prior the school had emerged from a challenging amalgamation of the local primary and high schools. Even with the best intentions and strategies of the merger school leaders, many of the staff did not want the amalgamation. They were anxious about it. And the high school's staff were traumatised by a particularly distressing school review prior to the merger. The college lurched through the first four years, not quite able to build strong connectedness, trust and community. Merging school communities is one of the hardest cultural undertakings to lead. The toll on school leaders and teachers doing this work can be difficult and exhausting.

Three years into her principalship I found a strong example of a Ferocious Warmth leader in action. As well as knowing that Meagan fulfils ‘the goods’ of Ferocious Warmth, two staff members from her new school emailed me to ‘dob her in’ when I called for nominations at a leadership conference. What follows is a powerful story from her first year at her school.

Meagan arrived just as the school had been reviewed. Not just the content, but also the way the report was delivered left the staff traumatised and demoralised. Many of you would have experienced the different ways a school review can unfold. Fortunately, through learning and processes evolving, most school reviews are thorough, robust explorations of both a school’s strengths and its areas of growth. Data analysis and strong collegiate conversations within the school review panel, often with an experienced principal from another school as well, are coupled with conversation with the staff to ascertain where the school is at. System leaders have worked hard at reviewing their part to play as partners, not judges, in this process. At its worst though, when hard realities need to be faced in an already demoralised culture, an external school reviewer when sharing the findings and the final report can inflict trauma, leaving leaders to pick up the pieces.

Meagan told me, ‘I think I spent a lot of time wondering what I’d done, because the stories that came out in response to me taking this job on were around, “What the hell are you doing?” and “Why would you go there?” or “It’s a really tough gig.”’ The review had shattered the staff and the organisation.’ Meagan also believed that some of this reaction stemmed from staff experiences prior to the merger.



Reflection pause ...

Let’s take a moment to identify the Ferocious Warmth elements involved in Meagan’s approach.

Even with this small window into her actions, we can observe the following:

Ferocious: courage to have potentially difficult conversations.

Warmth: empathy to seek to understand perspective and hold the space for people to be vulnerable. When we come from a curious and empathetic stance, people felt connected and not judged, exploration could then occur.

Meagan again. 'I also met with the reviewer who gave me some context. I felt her to be a pretty aggressive person. I met with the previous principal and got context from that perspective as well. I met with staff individually just for coffee and conversation. They talked about their history in the school, who they were out of the school. All of them turned to that review as part of that conversation.

'The school was not performing well in terms of the data that was examined. I got the sense through these conversations just how hurt people were. If you've been in a school for a year, you don't really own the data yourself, but even the people that had been there just that year were broken as a result of what had happened through that process. Just about every single one of them, at some point, brought up how they felt through the process of review. This was prior to us even getting the report. I heard all those stories. I heard about the trauma that had happened in the previous review prior to the merger and how they felt cut down to size. They really had the finger pointed at them, that it was their fault and they weren't good enough at the work they were doing. And so on. The stories were consistent. People that had been here for less time, were less invested, but still saw and experienced the angst.

'These conversations also brought out how upset people were with leadership. A lot of staff that had come into the amalgamation didn't want it and had used that as an opportunity to really go hard on the leadership of the school at the time it was an opportunity to have a go and say "it's their fault, not my fault". The previous leadership had to deal with some less-than professional behaviour.'



Reflection pause ...

Emotional and Strategic Intelligence guiding the Ferocious Warmth Leader's Reflection:

What is the context I am leading in?

What are people's emotional needs and current reality?

What strategic approach do I need to take to a) get this school moving forward strategically?

b) get this school moving forward culturally?

What does this community need from me as a leader right now?

How do I acknowledge the positive intentions and attributes of my predecessors?

FEROCIOUS ADVOCACY

Meagan was kind and frank in her dealings with everyone. 'I sat down with the reviewer and said, "The manner you have dealt with them so far has hurt them. When you present this report, it needs to be in a way that empowers them to move forward, not slapping them back to the ground." ' (Author's two cents worth... you'd think this would be in School Reviewer 101, wouldn't you? But over the years I've worked with too many schools that have suffered from fearsome feedback rather than Ferocious Warmth feedback from reviewers.) Meagan admits to being quite blunt in this conversation, but feels she had to be. The reviewer's PowerPoint presentation's footer claimed: '[this school's] kids fall behind' on every single slide, for council and for staff. In this statement, she invalidated everyone.

Meagan continues: 'That was a really interesting moment in the journey. I let her walk out the door that day and I rang my boss and said, "She's not coming back. I don't care how many hours we're meant to get from her. She's never walking back in this door again." I wrote to our community, both the school councillors and the staff: "What we heard is what we heard. Let's break it down to what we're going to do something about." I said that we weren't going to be beaten around the head about what we haven't done in the past. We were going to look towards what we could do in the future. It was time we advocated for our community.' Meagan also looked deeply at the data and found much more nuance, as well as growth that had not been highlighted by the reviewer and made sure to share this with the community. 'Because if you'd sat in that council, you would have pulled your kid out. I said, "We've heard a story but we're more than those bits of data that were highlighted. Let's move forward."'



Reflection pause ...

The image of Meagan standing there, essentially saying, “Back off, you are not helping. I’m protecting my staff. We’ll do this work, but you’re not helping,” is incredibly powerful. Can you hear the Ferocious Warmth conviction that Meagan brings? She knows what she stands for and that her job is to look out for her people and community, just as much as to look out for the outcomes. Results and relationships. The school needed a strong advocate and got a principal that was prepared to have everyone’s back, as well as lifting the bar.

This strong and courageous advocacy stance, coupled with intense listening and empathetic curiosity, led to strong trust in Meagan as the new principal. To do this with conviction, Ferocious Warmth leaders draw from their personal principles to keep that stance strong.

Does Meagan get it right all the time? Of course not. But she’s on the ground, doing the work.

I asked Meagan to tell me about one of her most important principles when it comes to leading:

‘I think it’s about always assuming positive intent, regardless of what’s being said or done. I don’t believe anyone in schools, your own staff in particular, are out to get you or out to make things harder for anyone. We all make mistakes. Just asking a question can change our insights and understanding. A lot of people came to my door during the first year and said, “Apparently so and so did so and so.” My first response is always: “Let’s ask them.” It took people time to realise that hearsay and one-sided commentary wouldn’t cut it with me. I would say to my leaders: ask the question, and I also modelled that. Because often you find that apparently so and so isn’t actually what’s happening. So, my advice is, “Just ask the question.” Then I’d ask the other person involved. They’d say, “Oh well, yeah. That’s partly right but this is the rest of the story.” It gives you a

clearer picture. It also models the principles of restorative justice, which we enact throughout the school.'



Reflection pause ...

The principle of positive intent is a great example of the Ferocious Warmth element of CONNECTION. What are your stories of stepping into Ferocious Warmth? If you shared your story with others, could they identify the fluidity between ferocity and warmth? Would they hear the principles and values that underpin your leadership? Would they feel the connection to your purpose and the people you lead?

In contrast, the school review in 2020 was a very different experience. To start with the process has evolved since 2016. But the four years had also seen strong, strategic work in building a culture of connection and learning. There was a positive increase in all areas of the staff opinion survey, with all targets exceeded. At the beginning of the process the reviewer asked the team to write down what they hoped to achieve through the review. This is a powerful activity, which sets a frame of inquiry and openness at the beginning. Meagan wrote, 'To restore community confidence in the purpose and process of a school review and to celebrate the work that has been done.' Meagan saw this as an opportunity to again advocate for the community and challenge perceptions happening in the classrooms. This was definitely achieved through the review process.

Meagan: 'We know we still have a long way to go when it comes to improving academic outcomes for all students; however, we now have the preconditions in place to achieve this and the right mindset amongst staff to do the next layer of work. I have moved away from saying that we are lucky not to have blockers within our staff. It hasn't been luck. It's been the plan to develop a positive staff culture. We have invested in it, recruited for it, built structures to support and engage staff in the way forward and challenged it when it isn't being demonstrated.'

WHAT ABOUT TRUST?

Professional trust is one of the outcomes of Ferocious Warmth leadership. It can't be created by strategy, but through the concepts and elements we have just been introduced to. Meagan, for example, has built strong levels of trust in a short amount of time. Yet trust is not a *project*. It is a way of being. It's embedded in every behaviour, interaction, structure and process that surrounds leadership. It requires fine-tuned self-awareness and capacity building in both relational and professional competency.

In a literature review undertaken for the Australian Institute of School Teaching and Leadership in 2013, Dr Jessica Harris, Professor Brian Caldwell and Ms Fiona Longmuir¹⁹ summarised their findings on trust:

'There are two especially noteworthy conclusions. The first is that trust does not stand alone as a discrete capacity: it is the lifeblood of success in virtually every structure and process that involves the principal and other school leaders. It is for this reason that one-off efforts to create trust are unlikely to succeed. Similarly, a contrived project, even if sustained, may breed distrust.'

Second, while a headline finding that the quality of relationships is central to the creation of trust, the extent of that quality is influenced by many factors, including the competence of the leader: trust will be lost very quickly if a leader is perceived to be incompetent. It is therefore important to build strength in and draw on intellectual or professional capital in establishing relational trust.'

The critical statement here is: 'Trust does not stand alone as a discrete capacity: it is the lifeblood of success in virtually every structure and process that involves the principal and other school leaders.' In my book, *Glue – The Stuff That Binds Us Together to do Extraordinary Work*²⁰, I use a framework of Connection, Compassion and Conversation to guide leaders wanting to reflect on their organisational trust.

- Connection: to purpose, people and the work
- Compassion: people are seen and valued with empathy
- Conversation: dialogue is open, two way and about sharing and discovering.

All of these concepts are found in the stories throughout this book. Remember, Ferocious Warmth trust comes from head and heart, strategy and culture, character and competence.

chapter three

THE PARADOX OF YET

'Paradox: a statement that is apparently contradictory or absurd and yet might be true.'

Penguin Concise English Dictionary

'The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function.'

F. Scott Fitzgerald

Leadership is full of contradictions. Without them, leadership would be a walk in the park. We could make decisions quickly and easily, as the answer would be straightforward. Yet I know every person reading this book understands the complexity of leading. We need to draw from both our ferocity and our warmth to balance results and relationships. The visual image for Ferocious Warmth is the infinity symbol. Every moment of the day we draw from our head and heart, the evidence base and the beliefs, the cognition and the emotion. Blending apparent opposites makes ferocious warmth a powerful leadership approach as it builds the capability to ride the 'yet' of perceived dichotomy.

DANCING WITH PARADOX

At the centre of the infinity loop lies the 'yet'. The yet gives us permission to hold the paradox of:

- Explicit, yet empowering
- Strategic, yet people focussed
- Challenging, yet providing psychological safety
- Director, yet co-creator
- Compassionate, yet with high expectations
- Courageous, yet vulnerable
- Open to influence, yet with purposeful intent
- Focussed, yet open to ambiguity and flexibility
- Realistic, yet optimistic.

Simultaneously reflecting on both sides of the equation takes curiosity and skill. If we're driven by a strong set of principles that centre us, we can bring this duality together. Like an artist mixing two seeming opposing colours together, we end up with a third choice. It becomes a richer choice that incorporates strengths from both sides. It becomes what my mentor Matt Church, founder of Thought Leaders Australia, describes as 'non-dualistic' peace. He encourages us to think about the tyranny of the 'or' and step into exploring the nuance of the intersection of two seemingly opposing ideas. It's the opportunity that the 'and' and 'yet' and 'and also' provides us. Matt's thinking on the exploration and limitations of polarity has greatly influenced my own over the years. His book *Rise Up: An Evolution in Leadership*²¹ will take you on an exploration of yourself as a leader that you will never forget. It's a personal inventory on who we are when we lead.

REALIST OPTIMISM

Jim Collins discusses the concept of this duality in his well-known book *Good to Great*.²² In his description of the paradox and duality of optimistic realism, he names what he calls the Stockdale Paradox. General Stockdale was held captive in the Hanoi Hilton during the Vietnam war for eight years, suffering torture and other immense hardships. Through this time the mental fitness that got General Stockdale through was his faith that he would get out, even though he knew it would be the toughest fight of his life. He forced himself to see the brutal facts of the context and stoically deal with them. He believed he would prevail and that it would be a defining time in his life. The people who didn't deal well with the horrible reality they were living through were those who were in denial of the situation. They

kept saying, 'We'll be out by Easter' and 'We'll be out by Christmas'. These milestones came and went, and after a while their empty optimism left them and they 'died of a broken heart'. Research would show that Stockdale displayed optimism that was problem-focussed and emotion-focussed. He engaged with the situation while the others who didn't make it were disengaged from any strategy other than hope.

In stressful times, realistic optimists pull from both the head and the heart in their coping mechanisms. Research and meta-analysis on optimism research by Carver et al²³ found that optimism 'predicted active attempts to both change and accommodate to stressful circumstances, in ways that reflect flexible engagement'. In their meta-analysis of optimism and coping, Solberg Nes and Segerstrom²⁴ found optimism was positively associated with the two types of engagement-coping responses: those that are problem-focused (head) and those that are emotion-focused (heart). Optimists are responsive to the type of stressor being confronted. Optimists display problem-focused coping with stress that had controllable factors and more emotion-focused coping when faced with uncontrollable stressors (e.g. trauma). This adaptability and flexibility of the optimist is the hallmark of the Ferocious Warmth leader.

Seth Godin, marketing and tribe expert and one of the world's most prolific entrepreneurial thinkers, sums up optimism as a leadership attribute in one paragraph:

*'Optimism is an attitude and a choice. It involves context and focus. We're not deluding ourselves with the reassurance that everything is going to be okay (because that's not productive). Instead, we're committed to finding things we can contribute to, work on and improve. We're devoted to seeking out useful lessons and to discovering where the benefit of the doubt might be helpful. Positive thinking doesn't solve every problem. But it's a much better tool than negative thinking.'*²⁵

THE HUMBLE PERSISTOR

Continuing with the concept of duality, Collins' top leadership level (Level 5)²⁶ is about the ability to balance two seemingly opposing traits: humility and extreme persistence. An outdated view of leadership would see humility as a weakness, but Collins demonstrates that this humility is supported by strength that can also

be forceful and decisive. Either side of this humble/forceful approach is an asset on its own in context, but Collins believes the reason for these leaders' success is the unique combination of the two qualities. These Level 5 leaders also encourage strong robust debate, especially within a senior team, and devolve power from themselves to the team.

Without the blending of the seemingly opposing strengths, we become a victim of extremities. If we are by default always the fearsome leader or the very warm 'enmeshed' leader, everything is out of kilter. If we are only problem-focussed and not emotion-focussed, we respond in ways that don't take all needs into account. We end up making decisions that don't consider a whole lot of perspectives because we haven't listened to them. Ferocity can sometimes take the high road of 'being right'. At the other end, if we default to the warmth side, we might try to keep everyone happy, unwilling to upset the perceived harmony.

POWER AND LOVE

One of my most admired educators is Dr Briony Scott, Principal of Wenona School in Sydney, Australia. She is also convenor and founder of the Renaissance Women's Network. I worked with Briony's school a few years ago and witnessed her start-of-year speech to staff. I was struck by her brilliant oration, one of the most impactful I have ever heard. She inspired, challenged and collected everyone in that auditorium together for the year ahead. Briony encourages the people she leads to work together to continue to raise the bar in their work, while showing authentic and caring leadership. She's also a prolific tweeter.

Twitter is one of the ways to see inside people's heads. What do they share? What commentary do they bring? Briony's tweets are insightful and legendary! This tweet in late 2019 encouraged me to get in touch with her again and discuss all things Ferocious Warmth. It captures the nuance and complexity of leading in schools.

'Another chapter on school leadership that has yet to be written – understanding emotional regulation in communities, when people lose it and why, how to maintain equanimity, how to lead drama free, how to keep your heart open yet protected. School leadership demands connection.'

Briony Scott, school principal, Twitter, 22/1/2019

This is the challenge of the Ferocious Warmth approach. We often need to make strong decisions, sometimes hard decisions, and the best decisions are made from both the head and the heart. Connecting the cognitive and emotive together creates leadership that people are inspired by and drawn to. Yet opening our heart to others can lead to not protecting ourselves from attack or malice, which is why we need to draw on strengths from the opposing side. Questions to consider, include: What is my conviction on this? Am I listening carefully to the meaning behind the words? What values and beliefs are driving the interactions I'm having?

Briony's tweet reflects the challenge of the 'yet' around the heart. How do we remain open hearted yet protected? How do we walk willingly into an interaction that could potentially hurt us personally and professionally? Many readers could think of situations where they have gone in with a very open approach and been blindsided by a harsh, personal attack. We often walk towards conversations with an open heart, yet we can't control where the other person is, what is happening for them and how they see us. I asked Briony how she manages this tricky environment.

'Part of it is not setting up a forced dichotomy. You can have both a personal resolution or a personal strength about what you want. But you know that like an iceberg, at any point in time there's actually very little that we know for sure. As I get older, I get more cautious about being absolute. I'm more determined now about less things. I am more determined now for, example, about the power of kindness – it is such a powerful currency. Yet often this term is associated with weakness. But so much of what we bring to our work is not binary.'



Reflection pause ...

How absolute are you in your leadership? Could you approach with more nuance, more humility?

Steve Munby's book *Imperfect Leadership*²⁷ explores duality under the paradox of power and love. Munby is the former chief executive of the National College for School Leadership in England and the international education charity Education Development Trust. In a speech at the Seizing Success Conference in 2012 he named the great challenge of this paradox.

'As Martin Luther King says: power without love is reckless and abusive and love without power is sentimental and anaemic. I believe that at this time of great change and in an increasingly devolved system, we as leaders should not choose between power and love. We must choose both.'

Munby names four tensions when balancing power and love, which represent a move away from both ferocity and warmth. One from the characteristics of power, authority and decisiveness. The other from love, inclusion and empowerment.

'Being a pace-setter and being a coach.

Being challenging and being open to challenge.

Being competitive and being collaborative.

Being consistent and being adaptive to context.'

Munby's view of power and love 'is that they are false opposites and that the best leadership has both.' Ferocious Warmth leaders understand this.

POLARITY AT WORK

Jane A.G. Kise's book *Holistic Leadership, Thriving Schools*²⁸ is based on the concept of polarity through the Jungian lens best known via the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). Kise also uses the visual of the infinity symbol with twelve lenses to explore their characteristics and interdependencies. Jane talks in terms

of 'and'. Breadth and depth, community and individual, predictability and possibility. She uses the metaphor of breathing to explain the interdependency, the necessary exhale and inhale. Is one better or more important than the other? No, they are both critical and required. One is incomplete without the other. Ferocious Warmth draws from the same conceptual approach. We are richer when we access from both ferocity and warmth 'and yet', together contextually, as needed.

In a discussion with Jane Kise, she shared an example of working with a school superintendent to develop stronger decision-making skills. His default was to put everything to a democratic vote. Momentum was slow. Accountability was dubious. It reminded me of one of my beloved principals. When I arrived as a leading teacher at the school, decision-making was made more complex by his visiting every classroom to discuss each issue with every teacher before he made a decision. The school was one of the most collaborative places I had ever worked, but the process just didn't move us along. Like Jane's superintendent, there was very little forward momentum! As the leader, he had trouble identifying where perspective and insight were needed in the decision-making process and when he needed to make the call. Status quo won as he swayed between different staff opinions. As he built his leadership team, we moved to more transparent ways of making decisions, but it was challenging for him to stay centred and realise when over-consultation was causing chaos.

At a system level, paradox weighs in during transformation. Pak Tee Ng, from the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, is a Singaporean educator deeply involved in the development of school and teacher leaders. To me he exudes Ferocious Warmth, as he openly speaks of his aim to encourage educators to walk a path not easily travelled, with love, courage and resilience.

His book, *Learning from Singapore: The Power of Paradoxes*²⁹, published in 2017, tracks the shift to the Singaporean system: learning for life. Rather than learning for exams, this and other systems focus on citizenship and student wellbeing. This shift has required strong development in teacher capability around how they work and what teaching and learning looks like.

Ng writes about the opportunities provided by the creative tension of paradoxes. These paradoxes draw from the 'co-existence of timely change

and timeless constraints, centralisation and de-centralisation, meritocracy and compassion, and teaching less to learn more’.

As one of the highest-performing systems in the world, the Singaporean system is continuing to change for the better. Lee speaks of the approach that for many seemed to be ‘kicking away the ladder’ that got them to these results. They have been mindful of change, whether during something like COVID-19 or the complexity of the world in general. Singapore approaches challenges calmly and with courage to strategically look to the future, deeply investing in the capability of teachers and resourcing the system.

One of Ng’s most provocative paradoxes is ‘timely change with timeless constants’, because change should be moored to something timeless, so it doesn’t overwhelm us. This Ferocious Warmth skill draws not only from our strategic intelligence, where we identify our levers for change, but also our emotional intelligence to anchor this change to the foundations that provide the stability to leap from. It combines ferocity as a system for change, transformation and strategy, with the warm heart of focussing on the professionals on the ground. To improve a system, this connection is critical. Ng spoke at the ACEL Global 2020 conference and left us with a powerful statement that captures the balance of policy and implementation in a Ferocious Warmth way: ‘Students do not experience policies, they experience teachers.’

Seth Godin, who I believe is one of the world’s most provocative thinkers, posts daily. The day after hearing Ng speak at the conference, I received Godin’s blog on the arc and the arch in my inbox:

The arc and the arch³⁰

They sound similar, but they’re not.

An arc, like an arch, is bent. The strength comes from that bend.

But the arc doesn’t have to be supported at both ends, and the arch is more flexible. The arc can take us to parts unknown, yet it has a trajectory.

An arch, on the other hand, is a solid structure.

It's a bridge that others have already walked over.

Our life is filled with both. We're trained on arches, encouraged to seek them out.

But an arc, which comes from 'arrow', is the rare ability to take flight and go further than you or others expected.

A Ferocious Warmth leader has their eye on both – the arc and the arch. One holds permanence and years of weathering, the other is light, free and moving with momentum.



Reflection pause ...

What are the permanent foundations, the timeless arches of your school that you want to maintain? Where are the opportunities to seize the learning and timely change that contexts such as a global pandemic give us?

I see a difference in the momentum built in new leaders who want timely change, but who forget timeless constants. Principals who go in looking only for what's not working and what needs to change should expect warning lights. When we dismiss any of the foundations that hold a school steady, we smash people's faith in our leadership. I saw a high-functioning school plunge into dark morale and toxicity through a new leadership team holding what happened prior to their tenure in seeming contempt. It is devastating. The road to professional trust becomes treacherous and full of huge pot holes, sending the school backwards.

STANDING IN THE CENTRE

How do we stay poised in the moment – able to almost intuitively know where to place our focus or actions? It can be hard for many great leaders I know to articulate the breakdown of their thinking, because they work with unconscious competence. It seems they are in a flow state in this dance of Ferocious Warmth, drawing from where it's needed to get the best outcomes. They identify a few key internal messages as if they're intuitively driven by the four elements of expansion, connection, courage and authenticity. These drive the blend between head and heart and allow them to stay centred more than many others. Many great leaders unconsciously lead in flow, yet, importantly, when the situation is very complex, take the time to pause and consciously draw from these elements.

'Optimal experience depends on the ability to control what happens in consciousness moment by moment'.

Mikalyi Csikszentmihalyi³¹

Psychologist and author Mikalyi Csikszentmihalyi writes of the 'optimal experience' of flow. Csikszentmihalyi developed and researched the concept and theory of flow, which is now used globally in education, business, psychology and the creative arts. Flow is the state we're in when time flies. We're so immersed in what we're doing that nothing else matters – just the activity we're undertaking. When leading in flow, we can draw on and use strengths to sort through the challenges of the context with the skills of a sensei. There's Mr Miyagi again! If you have never watched *Karate Kid*, please do. Mr Miyagi is a great example of Ferocious Warmth leadership.

PULLING FROM THE PARADOX OF YET

A friend of mine rang me recently on her way to a meeting with a principal and a case manager. Rachel works with outreach youth services, helping to get out-of-home youth into school. She was worried about the meeting becoming adversarial with both the school and the youth service talking at rather than with each other. The principal and the case worker's previous interactions had not been successful. She feared that no one would take control of the meeting and it would become aimless and ineffective very quickly. She knew that people were seeing each other as adversaries rather than in partnership.

Rachel understands she is warm and relationship driven. In the past she'd gone with a softly, softly approach, not wanting to upset the delicate tensions or be 'eaten alive'. The challenge of influence without authority was raising its head. Collaboration and partnerships are often stymied by unsaid hierarchical protocols getting in the way. Rachel and I talked about the need to paint a picture of mutual success for everyone in the room and acknowledge the collective wisdom, while being firm that they needed an outcome that worked first and foremost for the student.

When I caught up with Rachel after the meeting, this is what she said:

'I went in and began with naming what was in the room and acknowledged that while in some ways we appear to be at odds with each other on the surface, we were actually working towards the same thing. We all acknowledged that. I asked that we spend time really listening to each other's perspective and understand that we all bring to this situation our own wisdom and practice. A little bit of the work had already happened before I walked in. I was five minutes late and the principal and case worker were already in the room. When I got there, they had been having a conversation about life in general, and the football. I think in those moments they saw their "humanness".'

Two interesting findings in the neuroscience of conversations are painting a picture of mutual success and listening to connect. I learnt this through the work of a mentor, Judith E. Glaser, author of *Conversational Intelligence*.³² These two characteristics increase oxytocin, serotonin and dopamine levels in the brain and decrease cortisol. When oxytocin is increased, the prefrontal cortex clicks in, which enables collaboration and problem solving. Whereas when cortisol is too high, the amygdala, the reptilian part of our brain, is running the show and we are more likely to experience heightened tension, lack of listening and empathy, and be driven by a need to be right.

Rachel's framing and the willingness of the other members to actually talk to each other in a more relaxed way primed the conversation for partnership, not a battlefield. It created transparency. Rachel took the lead on naming what could potentially get in the way of a purposeful and fruitful meeting. She connected into each person's strengths and opened up the dialogue with a focus on listening

deeply. In a short time, there was trust where there hadn't been in the past. She curated the environment where the 'yet' could live – robust yet respectful.

In *Conversational Intelligence* Judith E. Glaser calls this 'taking the lead'.

'Quell the amygdala by talking about the threats and fears that are standing in the way of building trust. Be open and communicate with others to share and quell threats. This sends messages of trust that the amygdala understands: "I trust you will not harm me".'

There are too many meetings held with no time to discuss, listen deeply or connect to our humanity. We are social creatures and our brains are far more able to see and hear the nuance and perspective of a difficult situation when we are connected. Rachel laid the situation on the table at the start with humility yet strength, focussed on bringing out the best thinking in the room for the student and the school. This time, the case manager was able to hear where the principal was coming from, while the principal was able to understand more fully the remit of the case manager. When they had a more complete understanding of these perspectives, they were all able to take those into the decision-making.

Rachel concluded: 'In the end, it was acknowledging that everyone at the table brought their own professionalism to solve the same problem that made the difference. On reflection I realise I would always usually do that but was fearful of being attacked like I had in the past.'

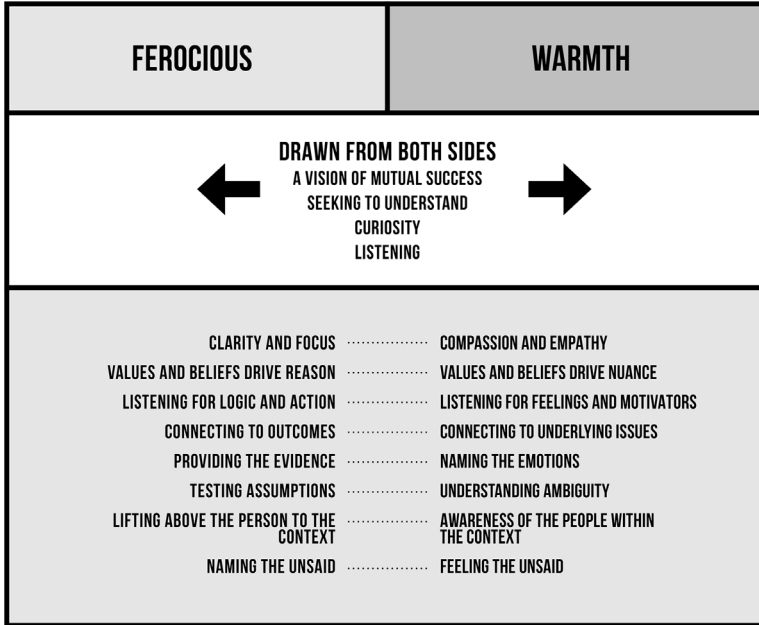
My response to Rachel was that all she needed was to reconnect with her conviction and courage about the work. Her fear and nervousness had put her out of balance. She had lost sight of how to combine the duality of conviction and compassion. A quick discussion got it back. She was able to stand in the centre of Ferocious Warmth and pull from both sides to step into flow.



Reflection pause ...

Reflect on a recent conversation that challenged your centredness. Which side of the Ferocious Warmth approach could you have drawn more from to regain balance?

Figure 6. Centred Conversations



Why is it so hard to hold both sides? Are these things really opposed? I don't believe so. But I do think society is too focussed on being on one side or the other, adopting extremes rather than integration.

Ferocious Warmth leadership seeks to come from a place of balance. Drawing from the facts, the evidence, the logic, while sustaining the trust, relationship building and empathy needed to lead people well and achieve outcomes and wellbeing. This is the power of yet.

Ferocious Warmth leaders are those who straddle the 'yes and' and the 'yet'. This ability to blend seemingly contradictory approaches allows them to step into the power of Ferocious Warmth. They:

- are brave and courageous in the face of big challenges, and inspire their people to come with them on the journey.
- are lead learners who provide the right balance of high challenge and high support. People feel psychologically safe to raise and discuss ideas, differences of opinion and share personal challenges.

- draw from clear evidence base, as well as provide the culture that allows innovation to flourish.
- have strong conviction on their leadership beliefs and discuss them openly with others.
- work from a firm set of values and moral purpose.
- build trust through their ability to empathise and deeply listen, and surf the wave of logically and emotionally based discussion.
- inspire people to be their best self and connect into the vision and purpose of the organisation.
- build deep collaborative cultures and create leaders within their teams.
- lift expectations and give support to achieve the results and transformations required.

Cultivating our skills on both sides of ferocity and warmth is the work to do.

How do you identify them?

chapter four

STRENGTH AND SHADOW

Like a tightrope walker high in the air, staying centred keeps us balanced. A tension exists in staying in the duality of ferocity and warmth, which can wear us out if we don't explicitly build our skills on either side.

HEAD AND HEART

One way to categorise Ferocious Warmth skills is through the lens of head and heart. The cognitive work and the emotional work. These extremes were highlighted for me when working with a diverse group in a government transport agency on the keys to being more collaborative. A systems engineer bemoaned that too often problem-solving processes simply ignored the facts about whether something was doable. The customer-experience director responded, 'I find the opposite. Too often the systems and fact-based approaches we use to make decisions don't take into account the end user at all. Then we wonder why they fail.' Two classic examples of project work done by the head or the heart, not the blend. But at least there's acknowledgement that success needs to somehow incorporate both.

Yet most people know they have a bias for thinking more one way than the other when not consciously focussed on it. I remember learning from two of the original leaders of MBTI (Myer-Briggs Type Indicator) in the early 2000s the concept of doing a sort-of type test in the stance of your 'shoes-off self'. We know context matters. Who we're working with affects us, but we also deep down know

that when we don't have to worry about anyone else we tend to a more logical, head approach or a more emotional, heart approach. No judgement lies here. It's simply where we like to go when we don't have to think!

Research into decision-making and reasoning has uncovered an intricate dance between our cognitions, emotions and feelings. Matthew Liebermann is a researcher and leader in the science of social cognitive neuroscience. His work demonstrates that the inner workings of the brain sort into an analytical-brain and social-brain response. We also use what he calls social and non-social reasoning. Each handles information quite differently, often at odds with the other. For groups, this is a huge challenge. But then we discover that our own brains also struggle to blend both!

Liebermann was originally a PhD in social psychology yet found brain science fascinating, which he also studied, using both in his research on social connection. Understanding and experiencing the overwhelm we often feel when reading any neuroscientific findings, he sought to demystify academic brain theories. His initial major work on social pain being as significant as physical pain shows our deep need for belonging, and the importance of a culture of inclusion when leading. His books are well worth putting in the 'books I will read' pile! His research into the brain network shows that we turn different parts of our brain depending on the type of reasoning we are undertaking.

*'In many situations, the more you turn on the brain network for nonsocial reasoning, the more you turn off the brain network for social reasoning. This antagonism between social and nonsocial thinking is really important because the more someone is focused on a problem, the more that person might be likely to alienate others around him or her who could help solve the problem. Effective nonsocial problem solving may interfere with the neural circuitry that promotes effective thinking about a group's needs.'*³³

Social reasoning is the basis of true collaboration. Is it possible to create that balance of head and heart if we are battling thousands of years of brain development? Yes! Continued evolution comes from our current approach not matching the complexity of the current context. If we are committed to developing our leadership skills, then continuing to build the strengths of both sides is the work to do.

Here is a not-exhaustive list of strengths that could be categorised into head and heart. You might recognise it from our original Figure 1 Ferocious Warmth table in Chapter 2.

HEAD	HEART
Objective	Compassionate
Results focussed	Emotional reasoning
Cognitive reasoning	Empathetic
Strategic	Nurturing
Decisive	Supportive
Clear	People focussed
Process driven	Loving
Consistent	Open to influence
Reliable	Beliefs
High expectations	Intuition
Factual knowledge	Connecting
Evidence based	Optimistic
Authority	Exploratory
Action	Influence

When you look at the list, do you find strengths on one side influenced by strengths from the other? The best strategic 'head' thinking is flawed if it does not use the 'heart' skill of empathy into the strategic process. The 'heart' beliefs we have as educators can be flawed without the 'head' evidence of the impact we're having. It is not an either/or. Hand in glove. Ferocious Warmth.

And.

Yet.



Reflection pause ...

Through the lens of head and heart, you may identify other words that work for you. Which are highly developed strengths on both sides? Which could do with some work? If you see them, I cheer you for your insight! If you're not sure, ask a colleague which they see as your strengths.

PUSHING OUR STRENGTHS INTO SHADOWS

Assessment tools such as VIA Character Strengths³⁴ and The Cliftons' Strength Assessment³⁵ are useful for uncovering strengths. I've found going back to my top strengths helped me stay strong through adverse times, such as COVID-19 lockdowns during 2020 and other challenges. Our strengths rise to the top in times of crisis. My top strengths of individualisation, strategic, activator, adaptability and learning allowed me to deal with a complete change to how I run my business and shift the support I offer to the people I serve. It helped me think of and trial different ways of continuing to do this work.

Yet our strengths can also have shadows. The Jungian approach to shadows suggests they are hidden from the conscious mind and are dark and dense. Jungian shadow work takes people through a process of diving into the unconscious mind and bringing these tendencies and fixations to awareness, to integrate them.

If you're thinking I'm about to launch into a Jungian dialogue, don't worry! Let's use the word shadow as simply a way to reflect on ourselves when we get out of balance and our strengths go to extremes. Let's not beat ourselves up when we go to extremes, but look at how we might evolve through our awareness and insight. The MBTI (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator) world calls this 'in the grip'³⁶, which I think reflects what happens perfectly.

Some examples of strength into shadow:

- Optimism can move to naivety

- Trust can move to gullibility
- Objectivity can become aloofness
- Results-focus can shift to task-only focus
- Cognitive reasoning can lead to being emotionally absent
- Concise strength can lead to being harsh
- Compassion can become rescuing
- Strategic strength can lead to being dominating and disconnected
- Supportive strength can mean doing too much for others.

These are not hard and fast, nor are they the same for everyone. This work is all about self-awareness and understanding our impact on ourselves and those around us.



Reflection pause ...

Identify: Make a list of your known strengths

Explore: Reflect on some examples where one of these strengths made a positive impact on the work you do

Stretch: Find times where focussing or pushing this strength too far were less than useful

Stabilise: Look to a strength from the other side of the ferocious-warmth flow. If your extreme strength/shadow was from the head, what heart strength would have helped the situation?

Or, if your reflection focussed on a heart strength, what head strength would have been useful to draw from?

Here's an example of being 'in the grip'.

Steven was becoming overwhelmed by doing too much for others and not having enough time to do his own job. As a senior lawyer in a large organisation, his role was designed to be strategic. In his leadership Steven was supportive and open to people's challenges and issues with workload. Unfortunately, this meant he was doing many tasks that were not his. You know that feeling when the

email comes in or there's a knock at the door and your inner voice says, 'Again? Is this really my problem?' His team bounced problems up to him instead of using him as a sounding board during challenges. Steven's team took advantage of his compassion, and he let them. Even the experienced leaders shirked their responsibilities, because Steven would deal with them. Soon, other members of his team expected him to take on their trickier situations as well, instead of seeing him as a safety net and mentor.

Among others, Steven's strengths are heart: supportive, empathetic and compassionate, but you can see what's coming, can't you? On the shadow side, these become resentful, walked-over and burnt out. So we worked together on a number of ferocious head strengths to get him back on track.



Reflection pause ...

Where would you suggest Steven move his focus to? What head strength would help him step into more conviction about his role of leading and supporting, not doing?

Steven began a more strategic look at what was going on. Drawing from an objective view, he clarified the roles and responsibilities with his whole team. He reflected on how he delegated tasks and undertook professional learning that improved his delegation skills. When his senior team tried to move things up to him, he supported and coached them to take responsibility. He also provided external training and development for the team to become more proficient at Ferocious Warmth conversations. Most of all, Steven drew from conviction and courage to have the more difficult conversations with people taking advantage of him. He drew a line in the sand.

On the other side of the spectrum, Toni was focussed on shifting the data. Her strong strategic plan was rolling out and her eye was firmly on actions, outcomes and impact. But her team was struggling. The strategy was great, but the timelines

were unrealistic. Toni, with her gaze firmly on the outcomes, had forgotten to check on how people were travelling. People were getting burnt out and, as one more email came into the inbox with the next task, some were close to breaking point. One of her team bravely fronted up to discuss the issue. To Toni's credit she diarised time to sit and evaluate where things were at, both individually and with her team. Knowing her strengths were very much oriented to thinking, Toni decided to connect to how people were feeling. She posed questions that asked what was stopping the forward momentum and uncovered how people really felt about the situation. Then she was able to work with the team to correct course.

When the tightrope walker is leaning too far to one side, she or he overcompensates by pulling from the other side to get back in balance. Of course, things get wobbly! When our extremities come out, we need to steady and consider our rebalancing options.

THE BIG WORDS

The four elements of Ferocious Warmth are the key pieces to maintaining this sense of balance and centredness. When we experience *expansion* we create an ever-evolving space of learning and growth. When we maintain *connection* it reminds us of our humanness and our belonging. When we stand in *courage* we draw strength from who we are and what we stand for. And when we connect firmly to our *authentic* self, people are sure of who we are.



Reflection pause ...

We'll dive into these elements soon, but first: what do you do when you shift out of balance?

chapter five

THE IMPACT OF IMBALANCE

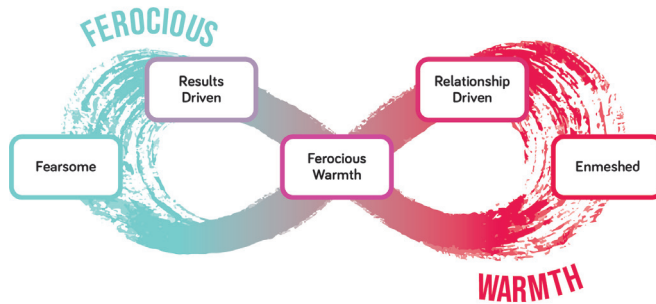
Many of us know the feeling. The to-do list is four metres long, everyone is after a piece of you, and you just wish you could get people to move faster, take responsibility, or make the right decisions, but they don't, and you have to step in to fix things. For many of us, our default leadership needle tilts towards the ferocity side of imbalance.

“ FOR SOME OF US, AS OUR FEROCITY SPEEDS UP OUR PEOPLE METER STARTS TO DIMINISH. ”

Our need for action, finalisation, movement, decisiveness means we short circuit our thoughts away from people to hard-edged results. The pendulum swings too far from centre. This is the territory of the results-driven leader. Take it too far and we become the fearsome leader.

For leaders on the other side, as everything speeds up and stress levels rise, our results meter starts to lower and we lose sight of our vision and strategy, our purpose. The volume gets turned right up in our heads and we vigorously defend our people and get involved in stories and dramas – our own and those surrounding us. This is the territory of the relationship-driven leader. It's all pressure and stress. As this rises further, we become the enmeshed leader.

Figure 7. Moving Out of Balance



UNDERSTAND YOUR BAROMETER

A barometer measures air pressure. The image that comes to mind when I think of a barometer is a gold-rimmed thick dial with beautiful mix of fonts designating the weather conditions. When the air pressure is heavy the dial turns one way, when lighter it turns another way, the black arrow pointing to the current weather conditions. The measurements range from stormy to very dry. This metaphor is a useful way to describe our popping out of our infinity loop into imbalance. We start drifting to one side or the other.

At our best, we stand in the centre of the infinity loop in calm balance. We stand solidly, drawing on our ability to create strong collaborative cultures built on warmth, trust and connection so that people can thrive. We're also drawing from our ferocity, lifting the bar, asserting boundaries, achieving the measures, and using the evidence base.

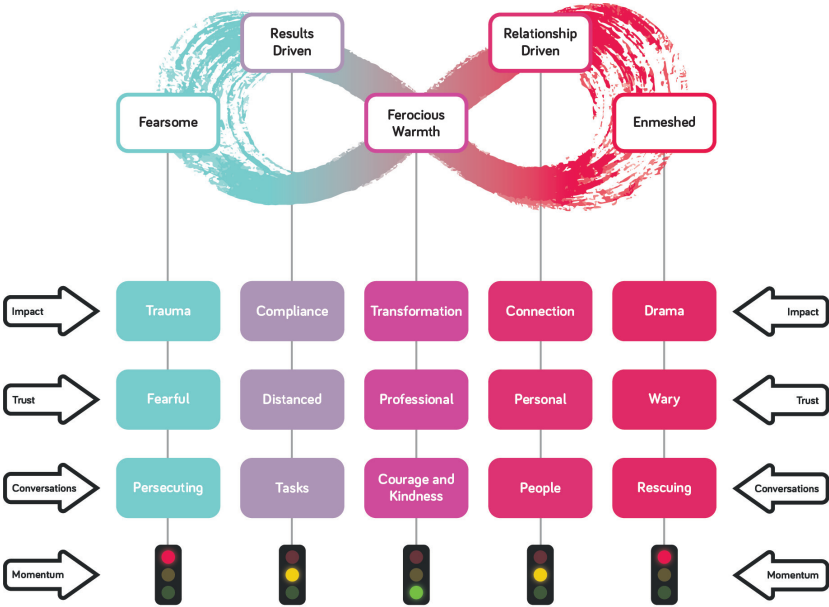
Then the pressure rises. We start to swing a little. Our self-awareness helps us understand where we swing by default. Self-awareness is the number-one skill for this work. We build it by focussing our attention out, looking for the outcome.

Is it having the impact that our students and staff need?

Our own families can also tell us with honesty! When things are a little out of balance for you, where do you go? More ferocity or more warmth? More head or more heart? What's your preference? What are the descriptors your team would use when you're under stress? This insight is gold to a self-reflective leader.

SHIFTING OUT OF BALANCE

Figure 8. The Impact of Imbalance



RESULTS DRIVEN

Results-driven leaders get results in many of the performance measurements using ‘hard data’. They put task before people, focussed on lifting standards and moving the team forward. Results-driven leaders work from a logic base in their decision-making and are clear and objective in their communications. They can struggle with building trust and having enough empathy for others. Their listening lens is generally from an objective, critique approach. When leading, they need others around them to bring human-centred leadership skills to their attention. Results-driven leaders rely on compliance more than collaboration to reach goals. They concentrate on growth and improvement.

Trust is distanced. The connection between the results-driven leader and the students, teachers and community can be reserved and aloof.

Conversations are predominantly task-driven.

Impact is more about compliance than commitment, due to the interactions being about engaging the head, not the heart.

RELATIONSHIP DRIVEN

Relationship-driven leaders put people over task. They provide a culture of support and create high trust through empathy and connection. Decisions are made with emotional reasoning. They maintain focus on wellbeing and relationship building. Relationship-driven leaders can struggle with holding people to account and increasing ambiguity through unclear expectations. They can rely on others on the team to raise expectations and have the more difficult conversations. Their listening lens is generally from a subjective, emotionally based approach. They maintain focus on support and connectedness.

Trust is personally driven, creating an environment where we trust each other on a personal level, but not necessarily within discussion of our professional growth and areas of development.

Conversations are predominantly people driven.

Impact is more about connection than results.

Knowing our default provides insight into how to get back into balance.

Understanding what triggers this imbalance is slightly trickier! Knowing when we're heading towards extremes? This is critical to our wellbeing and the wellbeing of the people we lead.

EXPLORING THE EXTREMES — THE FEARSOME AND ENMESHED LEADERS

Warning label: we're going places that may feel uncomfortable!

Research undertaken by Amy Cuddy and colleagues Susan Fiske, of Princeton, and Peter Glick, of Lawrence University³⁷, showed that people judged to be competent, but lacking in warmth, often elicit envy in others, an emotion involving both respect and resentment that cuts both ways. When we respect someone, we want to cooperate with him or her, but resentment can make that person vulnerable to harsh reprisal. I know a principal who experiences exactly that. She cares very much for her team, but shows it in actions not warmth.

I feel deeply for her as she continually steps up to provide her people with the support they need, but misses the deeper connection, as it's not her natural

style. A number of her staff judge her harshly and she struggles with the loyalty of some of the more influential staff. This small but mighty group seem to sit and wait for her to muck up, so they can heap judgement on her and garner support for disenchantment in her leadership. As she is learning the emotional intelligence skills of connection and empathy, when she does share more of herself with her team, it can come across as martyrdom, sharing the challenges of her role inadvertently indicating that no one really appreciates her.

On the other hand, Cuddy and her colleagues found that people judged as warm but incompetent tend to elicit pity, which also involves a mix of emotions: compassion moves us to help those we pity, but our lack of respect leads us ultimately to neglect them. I have come across a number of leaders over the years who put their heart and soul into their roles yet didn't shift the status quo. They are warm and caring people, but they have not worked on the more ferocious leadership skills they need to lead a complex beast like a school. Competency in both relationships and results is needed for effective leadership. Strong decision-making, technical and pedagogical knowledge are both critical in the world of education. We cannot have one side without the other.

THE FEARSOME LEADER

A few years ago at a conference I found myself standing in line with a school leader who proudly told me that she'd started at a new school and would have half the staff out of there by the end of Term 3, because they were so 'crap'. This leader was passionate about students, but any teacher who showed a belief system or standards different to hers, was wiped as soon as she assumed they were not on her bus. Consequently, school turnover, morale and standing in the community was, indeed, crap. I was astounded by the vitriolic download on her teachers and shocked at how easily she displayed her disdain.

This was all kinds of wrong. How can we be so righteous about our work and the value of putting students at the centre, yet burn and intimidate the people we need to work with to get to there? Ferocity is about lifting our standards and continually improving for the sake of our students, but if we think we can do that by a 'chop off their heads' approach then we've got a long way to go.

When we're stuck in judgement and condemnation, we lead through fear.

We may not want to admit it, but we know that our approach is not bringing out the best in people. It's focussing on what's wrong, not the strengths. We create an environment that people are reluctant to be a part of. Often, we kid ourselves that we're courageous and standing up to those who don't hold up to our levels of professionalism, but, actually, we're creating a space where people are so fearful, their performance will never lift to where we want it to be.

In other cases, we can be seen to be harsh or non-caring when we're actually seeking to make everything OK. Our intent may be caring, but the delivery misses the mark. Simone experienced this recently. She knows that as a leader she needs to focus on the people and heart side, because, if left to her preference, she'd be purely on task. Simone is seeking to build warmth into her leadership and this self-awareness is a big step in the right direction. She has a high achievement belief system but can come across as lacking empathy and insight into her impact on others.

At the end of a particularly stressful and busy term and year, one of Simone's staff members was in a very fragile and exhausted state. His colleagues supported him as much as they could, buffering him from the extreme overwhelm threatening to overtake him. One of the leaders approached Simone and mentioned that he had asked the staff member to go home and take the rest of the day off. Simone walked briskly into the staff room where the person was sitting and demanded his laptop. Looking afraid and bewildered, he handed it over. She then demanded that he go home.

Simone, whose default is more results driven, was in stress herself, so her balance tipped into an immature type of ferocity with no filter. Simone was trying to look after her staff member but doing it in a fearsome way. She wanted him to go home, do no work and look after himself. Unfortunately, he thought he was being fired. Simone's concern for him came out as attack. Her emotional intelligence skills of self-awareness, self-regulation and empathy were not engaged.

Our insight becomes myopic when we are in ferocious stress. We focus on the outcome we're seeking and believe that our way to fix it is the only way.

THE FEARSOME LEADER CAN INFLICT TRAUMA

When this is the default style, the fearsome leader rules through fear. They are closed to ideation with their teams or senior leaders. There is a lack of psychological safety for those they lead, with people not willing to take any interpersonal risks for fear of retribution. They are the archetypal extreme authoritarian leader – my way or the highway. At its worse, the fearsome leader inflicts trauma on those they lead. Their focus is on being right. Their style of feedback is based on harsh criticism rather than growth. Forward momentum is difficult as people are not working at their best. Toxic behaviour is either brewing or in evidence when transformation is demanded and delivered as an ultimatum and through compliance. People do not buy into change due to a feeling of powerlessness.

Trust is very low and people are fearful. Self-preservation becomes the driving reaction.

Conversations are persecuting and seek to highlight what's wrong.

Impact is trauma. People exposed to this type of leadership over time can suffer wellbeing issues. Staff turnover can be high. Staff morale and other student and community indicators are low.

THE ENMESHED LEADER

When I was a young teacher I was on staff with Darren. He was a gregarious and personable team leader. People were drawn to his good nature and humour. If you were in Darren's clique, life was good. He would say the right things to make you feel better about the establishment, throwing shade at the bureaucracy and feeding the 'we're alright Jack' approach to maintain the status quo. Darren was charismatic and drew people to him with ease. People shared confidences with him, because they felt safe. Unfortunately, he would also get boozy at drinks with his mates and spill people's stories. As one of these 'chosen' few I became privy to information about others that I should not have known. The discussion would then dissect the revelations and gossip about that person. It felt very wrong to me, but as a new teacher, the need to belong and be part of the 'cool crowd' overwhelmed my integrity. It also made me very wary of sharing anything important with Darren.

Challenges started to appear for Darren's leadership when external measures on outcomes and a principal with transparent expectations started increasing

the pressure on performance. Darren's connections to those he led had become firmly entrenched in 'mate'. When the need for open feedback and shift in practice became necessary, many of us looked at Darren like a mate down the footy club or at a barbecue, rather than a leader, as he never inspired us to lift.

Deep down Darren had an overwhelming need to be liked and be the centre of attention. He used other people's life challenges to raise his importance in the group. He also led a resistance to change in the school due in no small part to not stepping up in his leadership role. Later, he became a principal of a small and struggling school. As the new leader he could have helped to turn the school into an amazing place for the students. Unfortunately, the opposite happened. Enrolments dropped. The last conversation I had with Darren was him blaming the department for the lack of support for his school. Of course, none of it was his fault.

THE ENMESHED LEADER CAN INFLICT DRAMA

The enmeshed leader unconsciously wants to be the centre of emotional attention within the culture. While supporting their teams, their relationships are unhealthy and drama-filled. This leader is deeply concerned about people not liking them and shies away from making decisions that might create disharmony. They deny, blame and justify when things are not going the way they want. They seek out the drama within conflict and add fuel to situations through a lack of clarity and objectivity. Often displaying rescuer behaviour, the enmeshed leader feeds a need to protect and be needed emotionally. They can create drama by getting too involved in people's emotional lives. Gaining momentum for change is difficult amid a lack of clarity of strategic direction and where people's work fits into the big picture. Harder decisions are avoided to keep the peace.

Trust is of a wary nature – we don't fully commit to a relationship with an enmeshed leader as their emotional response to open and honest discussion about the important things is inconsistent.

Conversations are rescuing in nature, stifling growth and autonomy in others.

Impact is drama. People walk on eggshells not wanting to offend. Bad behaviour runs rampant because the more important and clear conversations are avoided.

Both extremes – fearsome and enmeshed – keep others in victim roles, either feeling persecuted or expecting to be rescued.

RESCUER AND PERSECUTOR

The Karpman³⁸ drama triangle is a well-known mental model that helps unpack this. It identifies when we can be caught in a cycle of victim, rescuer or persecutor. Each of us can bounce around the triangle and go into all three positions, depending on the context and the relationship.

Victim: The victim is 'done to' by a persecutor and needs to be 'saved' by a rescuer.

Rescuer: The rescuer 'needs to be needed' by the victim and has a pattern of saving them from the persecutor.

Persecutor: Pays out on the victim and sees the rescuer as weak.

This model is all about patterns of behaviour. Habits that we can go into with certain people in our lives. While this framework is mostly used in family and partner dynamics, in many professional groups I work with there will be a number of people who can identify this dynamic is playing out. The Ferocious Warmth work endeavours to turn this relationship triangle into functional interactions.

But first we need to discover what pushes us out of balance towards the extreme realms in the first place. These steps can be confronting, but give us insights and self-awareness to regain equilibrium.

chapter six

UNCOVERING OUR UNMET NEEDS

The Guest House

This being human is a guest house.

Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still treat each guest honourably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
Meet them at the door laughing
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

I love this poem by Rumi.³⁹ It honours our messy humanness and acknowledges that all of our feelings have a place; that we should honour and heed them instead of pushing them down or away. How often as leaders do we give ourselves the space to own and honour how we feel? Sometimes the most extreme life stories teach us that doing so helps us step into our humanness even more.

Long periods of stress stretch us thin. Most of the leaders I have worked with or known are high-functioning achievers. Usually this means they push themselves far beyond what many others would do, sometimes to the detriment of their overall health. As they push through and push on, without dealing with the stress, they become either a volcano waiting to explode or a balloon slowly deflating. In 2015, I learnt this the hard way, as a result of what I now know to be one of the most extreme and traumatic experiences of my life.

My husband, Justin, and I were on a motorbike trip with two other couples, all of us close friends. Justin had a Harley and we loved riding through the mountains on road trips. We would ride all day and then stay at country pubs overnight. The evenings were full of laughter, good food, wine and company, the days full of the joy of the ride. Then the next day we'd do it all again.

I loved being on the back of the bike. There is nothing like the rush of going around winding mountain roads. As a pillion I got to look around and see the beautiful countryside, hugged in tight behind Justin.

Our trip over the long weekend in March 2015 was to go along the Great Alpine Road in Victoria, from Bairnsdale up to Bright. All six of us were excited about exploring a road we'd wanted to for a long time. We'd attempted it the year before but it'd been closed due to bushfires.

We set off from Bairnsdale on the Saturday morning. I remember the first part of the day clearly. Two of our friends were well out in front and the other couple were slightly ahead of us. As usual, before we started, we arranged our next stop and everyone rode at their own pace, which would differ every time, depending on how the boys felt like riding. The morning was clear and crisp. I remember riding

along the river, reminding myself to take in every moment. To be present.

About an hour into our ride, I noticed a plume of smoke ahead over the top of a ridge. I tapped Justin's leg, but didn't know if he'd seen it. A sense of foreboding settled in my stomach as we continued. Around a corner someone stood on the side of the road waving their arms for us to slow down. As we did, we went over a bump. Justin concentrated on keeping the bike steady as I let out a scream. I could see our two friends lying on the ground, their bike on fire.

The intense and tragic details that followed are not for this book. What's relevant is that I went into action. I felt numb, but part of my brain switched to making sense of the carnage and trying to help our friends. I did what I could, but it was too late. That day 'up on the mountain', as the four of us have referred to it since, significantly altered our lives, the trauma affecting all of us in different ways.

During the weeks after, our home became the central house for people who loved our friends to come together to grieve. I took two weeks off as we tried to not only deal with our own grief, but support our friends' children and families. We had two funerals to attend, with my girlfriend and I speaking at one, the boys speaking at the other. People wanted to talk with us and share their grief, as we were the people who'd been with their loved ones at the end. They wanted reassurance and some sense of closure. We were the closest of friends before the accident, but that experience 'up on the mountain' has bonded us for the rest of our lives.

As the main income earner in our home I went back to running my business. Occasionally, we talked about what had happened, but both Justin and I tried to get back on with life. I just kept on going. My work has always been important to me, as has being a good mum, so my head went down and I worked hard. I now know that I disconnected from what had happened. I pushed it down and looked straight ahead. I needed to be the 'strong one', the provider and the fixer.

One night a few months later I had to head down to the same part of the state to present at a conference. I was already feeling sick about it and, as fate would have it, another accident had happened and I had to go through a police road block past an overturned truck. Luckily, no-one was badly injured. After this, I pulled over and breathed deeply for a long time before I could drive on. I then got up in the morning and went on working with a room full of school leaders, who would never have known anything was wrong.

THE AFTERMATH OF NOT DEALING WITH EMOTIONS

It wasn't until three-and-a-half years later, as my marriage broke down and everything crumbled around me, that I realised how out of balance I was. I was angry and resentful in my relationships. All the best parts of me I gave to my clients, not my family. Two unconscious things were going on for me: a huge need to be in control, but, also, deep down I was crying out for someone else to take care of me. Yet I'd disconnected from those who loved me and was showing my care through action (must keep going, must keep going), not through loving presence and emotional connection. The irony of it all? I was doing the opposite of what I would encourage my clients to do – show self-compassion, pay attention to what was going on underneath, and breathe.

'The irony is that we attempt to disown our difficult stories to appear more whole or more acceptable, but our wholeness, even our wholeheartedness, actually depends on the integration of all of our experiences.'

Brené Brown, *Rising Strong*⁴⁰

I wanted to be seen as the strong, capable woman, able to pick myself up and dust myself down. A few years later, I was diagnosed with PTSD in among a separation and becoming a single parent.

Brené Brown calls this the Reckoning: understanding where you are at so you can find yourself a new course. Her book, *Rising Strong*, was a gift, allowing me to work through the stories I was telling myself as my life became more rocky. I used her process of an SFD, 'Shitty First Draft', to write down what I was thinking, something I had never wanted to do in my life before. I didn't need to read these again. The writing got the stories out of my head. I learnt about a whole range of things I'd been doing to numb the hurt and confusion going on deep down. I recognised that I'd been 'chandeliering' – pushing down emotions to appear stoic and fabulous out in the world, and then harsh and critical with those I loved the most, up on the ceiling, hanging on tight to the chandelier.

I also learnt about what we do to form an armour. We either over function, which is my particular poison – 'I don't feel, I do. I don't need help, I help.' Or we under function – 'I won't function, I will fall apart. I can't help, I need help.' As a chronic over-functioner, sitting in my feelings and just letting them be, not trying to

'do things' is something I find hard, but am slowly getting better at. As I work with many leaders about what their inner voice is saying to them, their 'story', we often end up in the same place – the limiting belief of 'I'm not good enough' is holding us all back unless we own it. Then, as Brené Brown, author of one of the best leadership books that deals with these real situations, *Dare to Lead*⁴¹, says, 'rumble with it and see where it comes from'.

In 2019, I saw Brené Brown speak in Melbourne and unearthed that when I work outside of my values, I experience not only resentment but go into victimhood. Everything went 'clunk' when Brown asked, 'What do you do when you are working outside of your values?' Boom! I saw my less-than-useful behaviours clearly linked to a lack of alignment with how I really wanted to work in the world when my two highest values are integrity and compassion. I realised that instead of showing compassion to those closest to me, I was resentful towards them for the smallest of things. This resentment turned into strong feelings of 'poor me'. All of this work was painful and enlightening. Thankfully, I'm continuing to embrace this aspect of my experience to bring the whole me to my children, my family and friends, and my clients. I look after myself and my needs better. I deliberately seek joy in my life and am surrounded by loving friends and family. I love my work and my clients. Gratitude has helped me get through some of the most challenging times in my life with as much compassion and grace as I can manage. Far from perfect, but a work in progress.

DOING THE INNER WORK

Are you thinking as you read this: 'Why is this story in a book about educational leadership? This is too much personal information!'

Because it's life. And I don't think we talk it about these things enough. It does affect how we lead, no question. It's the messiness of life that every one of us goes through. We have our own stories and journeys and every school leader has a life outside work. Joy, tragedy, elation, trauma. They all form the weave and weft of who we are. They affect our ability to bring our full-hearted self to the important work of educating students and leading communities. Knowing ourselves better allows us to understand how to get back to the balanced centre. We are more capable of blending ferocity and warmth and more in control of standing strong

at the intersection of both. This is part of the reason I run small group mentoring programs for leaders. We can discuss the impact of life in general and unearth how it helps, or hinders, our leadership.

This inner work is important. Great schools see curriculum and wellbeing as intertwined and dependent for positive student outcomes. Similarly, great leadership development sees that wellbeing and emotional health is an everyday part of leadership work, not an add on. Leader wellbeing is a vexed and challenging issue. During COVID-19, I asked many school leaders how well they were looking after themselves so they could look after others. The answer was: not well enough.

The Principal Wellbeing report, compiled by Associate Professor Phil Riley of Deakin University and Professor Herb Marsh from the Australian Catholic University, has a 50% response rate from Australia's 10,000 principals. It shows a disturbing trend for school leaders:

'For health and wellbeing, school leaders reported very high levels of burnout, sleeping troubles, and stress compared to the general population. These factors, which are a risk to school leaders' long-term health and even their life expectancy, are not isolated to school sector, school type, socioeconomic background or geolocation, only the degree of occurrence differs.'

Dr Theresa Dicke, Institute for Positive Psychology and Education (IPPE) Research Fellow,
Australian Catholic University⁴²

As leaders in the community, school leaders need to be open about what they need to thrive in the complexity of the work, and our systems support their fulfilment. Our system, community and media need to understand the pressures of leading schools and treat educators with more respect than evidenced at the moment. Professor Riley is hopeful that the positive impact of the leadership response to the 2020 pandemic will translate to greater understanding of the stressors and challenges facing school leadership.

But the first person we need to be open with and support fully is ourselves. The alternative is out-of-balance leadership and living. When we don't fulfil our nourishing needs, the fearsome or enmeshed leaders take over, using control or manipulation to get their less than useful unconscious needs met.

UNMET NEED

Do you know if you move towards the fearsome leader or the enmeshed leader when you are out of balance? Do some of the following statements resonate for you when you sit in the discomfort of examining instances of less-than-brilliant behaviour? Remember, the fearsome leader can inflict trauma and the enmeshed leader can create drama. With self-awareness we observe our impact on others and ourselves. These are some of the needs that might be driving behaviour if they're not being met:

EXAMPLES OF FEROCITY'S NEEDS

- To be right
- To be in control
- To achieve high status
- To be seen as credible
- For wisdom to be acknowledged
- To be 'good enough'.

EXAMPLES OF WARMTH'S NEEDS

- To be useful
- To be confided in
- To be liked
- To be irreplaceable
- To belong
- To solve others' problems
- To rescue others
- To be accepted
- To be 'good enough'.

AN EXAMPLE IN ACTION: THE NEED FOR IT TO BE SOMEONE ELSE'S FAULT

The meeting was an important one, but disorganised and running rampant. In the room was a principal, assistant principal, leading teacher and a student's parent. Emotions were high and no one was listening to the others. The relationship between the principal and the parent was historically not great. The parent looked

to the leading teacher and said, 'I've always been able to talk with you'.

'Yes,' replied the teacher, 'I know we've always been able to talk about things.'

At this point, the principal sat back, folded her arms and withdrew from participating. We could equate this with 'spitting the dummy'. Both the principal and teacher had a sleepless night over the disastrous interactions. The next day, the principal, assistant principal and the teacher met to discuss the fallout. The teacher was relieved they were debriefing and looking forward to seeing what they could learn from the whole experience and what they needed to do next. How wrong she was. It turned into a beratement of the teacher over the statement about having a good relationship with the parent. The principal had felt undermined and was determined to let the teacher know her mind. Fearsome. She refused to own any of the responsibility for the debacle, the disorganisation, the lack of deep dialogue that had people talking at rather than with each other, instead focussing purely on the teacher and her 'lack of support' for the principal.

This is a classic case of inflicting trauma through unmet need. The senior person in the room was not willing to take stock and reflect on all the elements that led to the negative outcome. She was overcome with a need to be in control and the one in the right. We could say she had a self-righteous need to be the victim, which was one of the reasons the meeting did not go well. This is not to say that responsibility should not have been shared. Perhaps the teacher inflamed things by saying what was said. Perhaps the assistant principal hadn't planned the discussion with the correct reports or clarified the purpose at the beginning? Maybe. The critical part is that the conversation exploring this could not be had because of the unprofessional and cutting way the feedback was given to the teacher, and the lack of reflection and willingness to take responsibility shown by the principal. With the teacher in tears, the only thing that occurred in that meeting was a scar in the relationship that would take a long time to heal, if at all. With courage, the teacher stood up to the vicious scolding, took a deep breath and said, 'The whole meeting was terrible. Disorganised, not prepared for, adversarial. We did not do a good job of it at all. And you are trying to blame the whole thing on me and my comment.'

TAKE ANOTHER DOOR

Any time we feel the need to blame, stop. Breathe. Pause. What is this all about? Is there something I could have done differently? Until we can acknowledge and articulate at least one thing, don't put any blame on anyone else. When we reflect on similar situations, step into self-compassion. We can be blindsided when we have a strong unmet need that surges up. What do you notice in yourself when you reflect on these types of interactions? Be kind, and learn.

When we're imbalanced, one of these unsaid needs has not been met. This doesn't mean it should be met, but that the need for it is outweighing our ability to work from a place of centredness. The principal in this story had a driving need for being right, for status and credibility, which she thought had been undermined by the teacher. This led to damaged trust. The other complexity was that the teacher's default towards relationships had become a red rag to the principal and seen as a weakness, which had coloured many of their interactions. Their baggage was determining the outcome.

A measured, Ferocious Warmth response could have been to understand the hijacking of our own emotions (emotional intelligence), objectively identify the lack of structure and purpose (strategic intelligence) and hold a debrief that set about exploring the learning, not who was to blame (learning intelligence). This process would have led to them all learning what they could have done differently.

WHO'S DRIVING THE BUS?

When unmet need is driving the bus, we can lack a conscious focus on either results or relationships. One goes by the wayside. We become victim to the voices in our head telling us that we need more control, more action, better standards, that people's work is not good enough! Or that it's not our fault, that people won't like us if we tell them the truth, or don't do what they want. These inner voices keep us small thus we unconsciously act in ways that are either unhealthy or don't get the best outcomes for a strong culture. These voices are also habitual, stepping in when we are stressed, tired, anxious or simply unaware of their power. We head towards the extremes of leadership – fearsome (far too ferocious) or enmeshed (far too warm).

Here's an example. There's a report due in which I've found errors. My unmet need for perfection and control over the quality of work I'm associated with sends

me into less-than-useful behaviours. I slam out an email to others in the team, liberally peppering my email with fault finding, blaming and shaming. No winners there. I lurch into too much ferocity.

Another example. There's a big event coming up. Instead of letting my team get on with the work, my inner voice is hyper-alert to all the dangers that could ruin it, so I micro-manage everything, getting very picky over the smallest things, and frustrated to the detriment of the quality of output and enjoyment of all involved.

While exploring these unmet needs, I was introduced to the work of Shirzad Chamine, author and Stanford lecturer. Chamine wrote *Positive Intelligence*⁴³ and it is a beauty. His Saboteur test has been taken by over 500,000 people worldwide.

According to Chamine, Saboteurs are a universal phenomenon, formed in our early childhood that keep our minds busy. They start off as our guardians to help us survive the real and imagined threats to our physical and emotional safety. But as we get older, and don't need them as much, our habitual ways of thinking keep them in employment. His approach is to invoke the Sage. The Sage is the wise thinker, able to reframe our less-than-useful beliefs. The challenge, as always, is about being aware of them in the first place! I call the Sage my Ninja.

Our inner Saboteurs can come from a number of types:

- **Judge** – constantly finding fault with self, others, circumstances, conditions. Chamine calls the Judge the Master Saboteur. We all have it at various times leading our thinking and feeling,

The 'Accomplice' Saboteurs:

- **Pleaser** – wants us to gain acceptance and affection by helping, pleasing, rescuing, etc. Our real needs become secondary and then we become resentful.
- **Controller** – wants us to take charge, get others to do what we want, and then gets highly anxious and impatient when that doesn't happen.
- **Hyper-Achiever** – must perform, must achieve, must be the best. Workaholic tendencies and a disconnection from deeper emotions and relationship needs.
- **Avoider** – avoids unpleasant and difficult tasks by being positive and pleasant in an extreme way. Procrastinates, puts things off until things fester or explode.

- **Hyper-Vigilant** – highly anxious that things around us could go wrong and the danger we may be in. Wears us down and blows things out of proportion.
- **Restless** – continuously on the lookout for greater excitement. Always busy. Highly distractible.
- **Stickler** – needs perfection, order and high levels of organisation. Causes anxiety and stress for ourselves and those around us.
- **Victim** – wants us to feel emotional and temperamental as a way of getting attention and affection. A big focus on internal feelings. Martyr behaviours can come up.
- **Hyper-Rational** – wants us to process everything from a rational viewpoint, including relationships. Causes us to be impatient with other people's emotions.

I find this explains many of our voices! And, of course, from a Ferocious Warmth perspective, some are more attached to the fearsome extreme (Hyper-Achiever, Hyper-Rational, Controller) and others to the enmeshed extreme (Pleaser, Victim, Avoider). Others can apply easily to either end.

When I coach and mentor leaders and teams, we often investigate the beliefs sitting underneath our thinking. The Saboteur is a rich and useful framework to help explore the unmet needs and behaviour drivers. The Sage or Ninja approach is one of the best ways to centre into Ferocious Warmth.

IS YOUR SAGE DRIVING THE BUS OR YOUR SABOTEURS?

Many of you would be familiar with Professor Carol Dweck's growth mindset work.⁴⁴ The saboteur approach is similar to Professor Dweck's way of identifying and working with fixed mindset personas. I had the privilege of working with Professor Dweck at a conference a few years ago, where she gave us a flamboyant experience of her 'Madame Perfect', whom she imagined dressed up in a red crinoline dress. Madame Perfect was the voice in her head that stopped her from sharing her book manuscript with colleagues for feedback. Oh, the irony – the book was on growth mindset! One of the biggest characteristics of growth mindset? Being open to feedback. This is of course not lost on Dweck, and the delicious paradox of this gave us not only a good laugh, but insight into looking at our own ironies.

Saboteurs, fixed mindset personas, we all have them.

Reflecting on my own saboteurs, I know that both my Hyper-Achiever and Restless voices were big in my head for a number of years. I know them well now. When they raise their heads, I hear them and see them in action. I name my personas. Two of them are Veronica Victim and Megalomaniac Marie. You might notice one is enmeshed; one is fearsome. I acknowledge them when they turn up. Now I'm armed to negotiate with them and dilute their potency by invoking my inner Ninja!

chapter seven

LACK OF CONNECTION

Along with unmet needs, the other context that can dislocate us from our centre space is lack of connection. This connection can be to ourselves, as we explored with the unmet needs of our inner voice. It can also be disconnection to the people we lead or to our purpose.

LOSING CONNECTION TO PURPOSE

Principal Paul had lost his connection to what inspired him most. He was trying to keep his head above water and lead his school out of a lengthy time in the doldrums, academically and culturally. Paul was a lovely man, a generous spirit who saw the very best in people. Unfortunately, he had a hard time holding people to account and creating an environment of transforming teaching and learning through collective efficacy.

The day I met Paul I sat down with him in his office. He closed the door and put a copy of my book *The Buzz* on the desk, full of colourful post-it notes. It always gives me a thrill to see that the thinking in my books is useful to people and so I clapped and took a photo (of course!) Paul looked serious and began. 'Tracey, I want to thank you for this book. I have been down in a great big rut for quite a while now. I go home and sit on the couch unsure what I'm going to do to change anything here or in my life. Then I started reading your book and I realise I can do

something. It's inspired me again and given me the reason to get up in the morning.'

The thinking in that particular book at that particular time helped re-ignite Paul's connection to his moral purpose. He'd suffered from burn out and mental-health challenges and needed something to open up his thinking and his heart to why he became an educator in the first place. He started to bring the joy back into the school and his own life. He stepped into more courageous conversations with his team and co-creating the vision they wanted for their students.

I started working with this school just as they had received their four-year evaluation. For the third cycle (eight years) the results had stagnated at the same level. We began using a multi-pronged approach to transformation, building their professional collaborative learning culture (The Buzz). Paul and his team worked closely with their senior advisor to create a solid action plan to transform teaching and learning. They were building their pedagogical capacity through strategic professional learning and peer observation. As we worked on the new plan for the school, we shared the story of the school. During this process, we map the journey visually for everyone to discuss and contribute to. At the end of the story, one of the more established teachers commented on how sad it was that the message was the same as it had been eight years ago and that they still needed to shift. It was now obvious to her that they hadn't listened back then. 'We need to do something to shift!' she said. Paul and I looked at each other in secret glee. His refreshed approach had helped move some previously immovable hurdles. People were becoming more aware of the status quo and their complacent environment. The work had begun!

Paul was building strengths previously not utilised. His default was more relationship driven, warm, and clear expectations and standards were not so easy for him. As stress increased, his need to be liked in the midst of hard decisions made him move towards too much warmth. He avoided the trickier conversations, which caused a lack of connection to purpose. As he connected to this purpose, his resolve and courage increased.



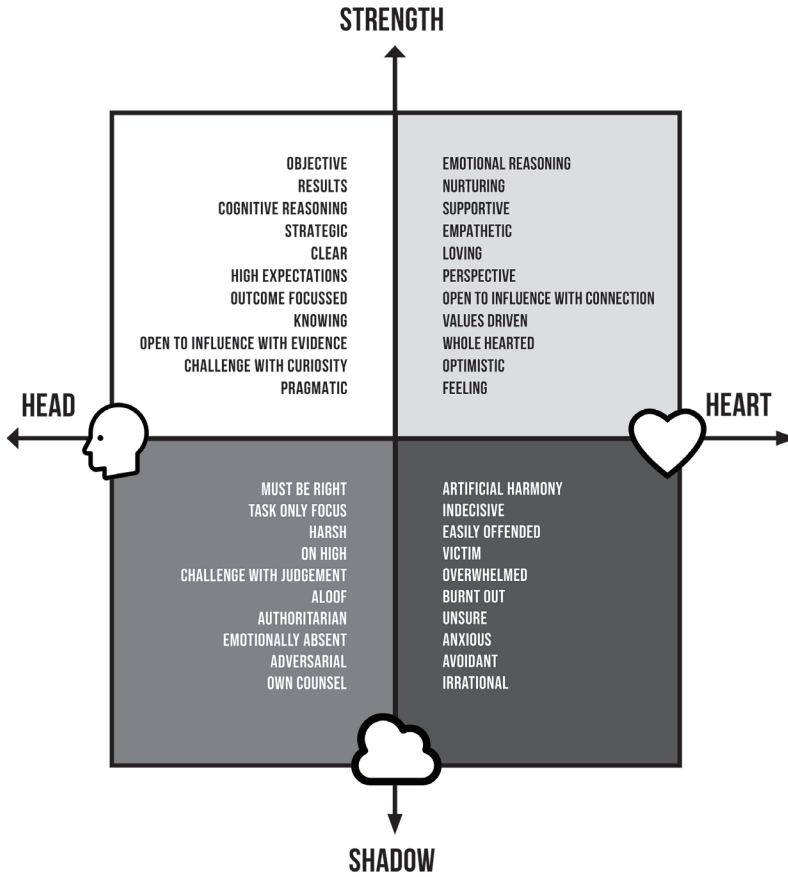
Reflection pause ...

Let's refresh our previous thinking on strengths and shadows. If your shadow is showing up instead of its strength, what could you pull from the other side to help centre?
Which strength have you disconnected from?

For example, if my high expectations (head strength) are causing me to challenge people harshly and with judgement (head shadows), I might pause and step into compassion and empathy (heart strengths) to guide the discussion. This would help me have an open dialogue to find out what's happening for 'the others' rather than jumping to assumptions. It helps me challenge with curiosity rather than judgement.

But if I'm out of balance and disconnected, the shadow is let loose. I might feel better, but will the other person? Maybe, through fear. But it will be short lived. Fear shuts down thinking, collaboration and wellbeing. Not a great cocktail.

Figure 9. Strength and Shadow



chapter eight

RECALIBRATION — BACK IN BALANCE

BEATING YOURSELF UP BEATS YOU DOWN

The metaphor of the dance of Ferocious Warmth came up in my discussion with Dr Briony Scott, Principal of Wenona School. In discussing the tension of staying in balance, Briony sees that we need to hold things lightly, as if moving backwards and forwards.

'You're constantly recalibrating. It's like being in a boat. You're never going to be stable, never going to be in that centre period for long. The challenge is how not to beat yourself up when you come away from the centre, just recalibrate and get back.'

By nature, we judge ourselves harshly. The judge in our head tells us we're not good enough when we slip, that we should have known better. When we recognise this, it's best to stop and appreciate the learning we've just been given. If we see it as learning, it's a gift not a tragedy. This self-reflection allows us to be better armed for the messiness of leadership. We then recalibrate and add to the way we work because of that messiness. As Briony shared: 'When you're in leadership where it's messy and you can't control people, it's because they're people, not factory parts. They're people and they're complex. If you can get 80% of your people doing 80% of what they're meant to do 80% of the time, it's a brilliant day!'

Here's a 'zone check' to help you assess the messiness, whether it's optimal, frayed or fragile...

OPTIMAL ZONE

The Ferocious Warmth zone – dancing the duality of both sides. Not always getting it right, but consciously getting insights, perspectives and behaviours that come from both sides of ferocity and warmth, head and heart.

FRAYED ZONE

When we're feeling frayed, we default to either results or relationships, a bit more head or a bit more heart. This sends us out of balance. Can you feel tension rising in yourself when starting to lean too much to the ferocious side or too much to the warmth side, without the tempering of the other to stay balanced? I asked one of my principal clients to explain how she might do both 'hand in glove'. She's an insightful and aware principal, who likes to push for excellence and sees herself as more to the ferocious side of the model. She knows she allows one of her leadership team to push her work-ethic buttons, judging the other as 'lazy' or 'full of excuses'. She realised that her unsaid expectations of this person were subjective and her empathy was in short supply. She pulled from the warmth side to bring her back to balance before she had further conversations about expectations.

FRAGILE ZONE

This occurs when we burst out of balance into extreme behaviour. It's a warning flare of what might happen if we don't take some quick measures to recalibrate to centre. For others, stress and rigid ways of working mean this is where we hang out most of the time without even realising it. It's where the fearsome or enmeshed behaviours rear their heads.

Some might not equate fragility with those at the more fearsome end as it tends to be about power *over* another, but I believe that whenever someone is behaving at the extremes, there is fragility, perhaps trauma and definitely high stress. If the extremes are a strong default position, narcissism can be at play. Narcissistic behaviours include an inflated sense of self-importance and entitlement. These types of leaders need constant praise and admiration and

often come from an 'I' position. They are masters at exploitation and manipulation without guilt or shame. This is the world of the true bully, one that intimidates and demeans others as a matter of course – a true 'fearsome' leader. Research by Professor Charles O'Reilly, Professor Jennifer Chatman and Bernadette Doerr⁴⁵, focussed on the impact of narcissistic leadership on collaboration and integrity. Their results found that more narcissistic people are less likely to demonstrate collaboration and these leaders prefer to lead organisational cultures that are less collaborative and place less emphasis on integrity.

Sitting for prolonged periods in the fragile extremities of Ferocious Warmth can be evidence of low self-awareness. Korn Ferry Hay Group research⁴⁶ found that among leaders with multiple strengths in emotional self-awareness, 92% had teams with high energy and high performance. Great leaders create a positive emotional climate that encourages motivation and extra effort, and they're the ones with good emotional self-awareness. In sharp contrast, leaders low in emotional self-awareness created negative climates 78% of the time. Too much head, logic, ferocity results in low empathy. Too much heart, emotion, warmth results in increased anxiety and worry.

GETTING BACK INTO BALANCE

Charlie, a leader I had for a few years, sent grenades every weekend in the form of emails that would greet us on Monday morning. He would sit at home, red wine in hand, and come up with all the reasons we weren't living up to his standards. He was highly stressed and dealt with this by trying to be in control. He had very little self-regulation and did little self-care, more self-medicating. He'd kick the filing cabinet if he had a bad phone call. It was all sorts of ridiculous. And, of course, we just had to duck out the way. His self-regulation was low and affected the standard to which we could do our work.

Emotional self-regulation is one of the skills of emotional intelligence. It provides us with the skills to deal with high-stress situations. It puts us in touch with what's happening cognitively and emotionally. Self-regulation increases our ability to manage situations and reframe them to something more useful. When we focus on self-regulation, self-care is one of the best ways to 'lengthen our fuse'.

SELF-CARE

Often leaders leave self-care on the bottom of the list. Yet we know that self-care is vital to our wellbeing and ability to fulfil our role. Without looking after our own wellbeing, we hold to the frayed and fragile zone more easily and frequently. Knowing what brings about calm and centredness for ourselves and investing in those activities, whether physical, mental, emotional or spiritual, increases centredness.

There are many ways to show self-compassion and self-care when we start to tip out of balance. Often, we know what keeps us centred, we just forget to use them or they slip right down the 'to do' list. There are many brilliant books and courses on such things as mindfulness and resilience that can help you if this is an area you know needs attention. More education systems are supporting school leaders through coaching and supervision, as a result of the stress of 2020. I hope this resourcing continues and becomes an accepted part of leadership support.

Here though, are some relatively easy ways to recalibrate:

JUST BE

Sometimes we just need to sit with our feelings when we're faced with difficult times and not staying as centred as we'd like. I remember lying on my couch after the devastating Victorian Black Saturday fires in 2009. I watched Paul Kelly sing 'How to Make Gravy' at the Sound Relief concert held at the Melbourne Cricket Ground raising funds for those who'd suffered during the fires, and balled my eyes out. It's a song that always gives me a tear. This time, it helped me let it all out. Sometimes we need to sit with being sad or angry or lonely. Just feel it. And that's OK. And then if you want to shift, it's great to put on pumping music, be silly, sing out loud and dance in the garden – or whatever takes your fancy!

BREATHE

When Justin and I and my friends experienced the trauma of losing our friends in the motorbike accident, our adrenalin and cortisol was sky high. One of the first people I called was my oldest friend, Ree. She's a therapist and counsellor. We've known each other since I was eighteen months old. All I needed to say to her was 'I need you here' and she was on the doorstep thirty minutes later. Over the next

three days, Ree spent time being present. She is a beautiful soul who has lived a life of huge challenge herself, yet manages to be the life of the party. Her laugh is infectious and everyone loves her. So much so that when she needed a hip replacement at the age of 41, all her work mates donated their sick leave so she could undertake the operation, even only being at the organisation for a short time. That is the type of impact Ree has on the world.

But this time Ree quietly took each person aside and let them talk. She taught us all, including the children, to square breathe. In for four with the nose. Hold for four. Out for four with the mouth. Hold for four. Repeat. Sometimes we would all do it together to settle ourselves and come together. I also use this in workshops to settle us down if the discussion is red hot or people are 'brain scattered' before they walk in. It's a calming, gentle way to recalibrate.

DO A WONDER WALK

Take time to walk around your school, specifically to observe and relish in things that are wonderful. So many awesome things go on in schools every moment of the day. Make a note in a journal about them, mention them to others, show gratitude, acknowledge them. Give your head and your heart a moment to acknowledge all the good going on, and your contribution to these.

TAP INTO JOY

For many school leaders the biggest joy bubble comes from hanging out with students. Primary school leaders talk about sitting in with the Foundation classes enjoying that energy and curiosity again. Secondary leaders tell me one of their week's highlights is teaching their favourite subject. Connecting to purpose yet again. I've seen Professor John Hattie walk through schools. He seems to spend a good chunk of time talking with students. While I am sure he's asking them about their learning, a part of me wonders if this is a bit of a joy bubble for him as well – connecting to the people at the core of the work.

MOVE

One of the easiest things to do is shift from where you are and move. Walk, dance, just move rooms. These shift energy.

CREATE SQUADS WHO HAVE YOUR BACK

Sometimes leaders are surrounded by people, but still feel alone. We don't always want to share work issues and challenges at home with those we're closest too. Our collegiate connections become more and more important as the world becomes more complex.

I have a few 'squads'. Different pods of close friends and colleagues who help me recalibrate when I get off kilter. These people love me for and despite of all my flaws and help to make me a better person.

When COVID-19 hit and my business calendar become blank for months ahead, Donna, Lynne and Maree became my strongest safety net. As the sole income earner in my family (well, to be perfectly honest, at that stage my son who works for McDonald's was way ahead), I really needed a plan!

Donna, Lynne, Maree and I have been friends for over a decade. Meeting through our professional networks we've learnt and laughed together through professional development, many meals and think-tank weekends where we go away to hatch some new thinking. We're lucky that our relationships straddle professional and personal. We don't work in each other's businesses. In a sense we're in competition, but we all have unique intellectual property that means we often refer our own clients to others in the group, due to the clarity of our particular message.

The four of us were all in the same boat of consulting practices – speaking, educating and facilitating. We usually work with groups or speak at conferences, which all came to a standstill in March 2020. It could have been a very scary and anxious time, and it was to a certain extent, but we put in strategies straight away to support each other.

Our WhatsApp group worked overtime. There were quick comments, early morning hellos to get us up and out of bed and dodgy memes sent for a laugh. We celebrated the smallest wins with silly bitmojis and virtual high fives. Most of all we made sure we caught up frequently online. For a number of years, we've enjoyed virtual Friday night drinks, as we don't live close, but this was a virtual support group on steroids!

At first we caught up every couple of days. Some days we were exhausted from the pressure of working out what to do. On those days we'd just let it all

hang out, sharing our feelings and fears. Usually, by the end of the time we'd also had a good laugh as well. Other times we were deliberately strategising, throwing audacious ideas around about how we could support our clients, as well as survive ourselves.

The interesting thing was that all of us had made shifts in between our frequent chats. We experimented and then shared our findings. As soon as someone had more information or insight, it was passed on. Those connecting times gave us the strength of resolve and conviction to keep going. After a few weeks the frequency of catching up lowered, as we got our heads into the tasks at hand.

Working with a number of principal networks during COVID-19, I asked them to share what was helping them stay centred and supported in trying times. Many principals shared that the support within the network had reached new levels of collegiate and generosity. New principals to the networks mentioned that they felt more connection in those first few weeks than they had previously in the group. Collegiate groups make all the difference to keeping our heads up.

But I have a few caveats.

STUCK IN THE VORTEX OF DESPAIR

Collegiate groups that keep us thinking the same way are not very useful. Debriefing and support are important, but if the responses keep us stuck or in a downward spiral, time to re-think. When one person's emotional state grabs us and we disappear into the vortex of despair, we all feel far worse.

CHALLENGE AND SUPPORT

Conversations that challenge our current perspectives and expand our thinking is what I gain from this particular squad of peeps. If these people can't challenge my thinking, who can? I also find support when I'm finding things tough.

ELEVATE OTHERS

Our purpose is to elevate each other whenever we can. I have a friend who disengaged from a group he was a part of because it started to become passive-aggressive when he experienced big wins in his professional life. Jealousy reared its head and came out as snide comments, sarcasm and lack of celebration. He

realised that the people in the group were getting together through habit, not through a particularly deep connection. Realising that the people we're with are making us feel guilty for achieving, or not, is a good step in releasing the power their opinions might have over us.



Reflection pause ...

Does your self-care kit get enough attention? Without it, the balance of Ferocious Warmth can slip out of our grasp.

Write down your top eight favourite balancing activities and track how often you do them. Is it enough?

Now for the Elements of Ferocious Warmth, the foundational attributes of Ferocious Warmth leaders, and to meet some exemplars. When we're centred, these elements: Expansive, Connected, Courageous and Authentic encompass our leadership. They bring together both sides of ferocity and warmth, hand in glove.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tracey has been a teacher and learner all her career and is known for her Ferocious Warmth leadership approach and collaborative culture work. Tracey's collaborative framework for creating an environment of learning, trust and innovation is used in education and organisational systems throughout Australia. Her Buzz Diagnostic has been used by over 280 schools and has had over 8000 educators participate. Tracey has run leadership programs for education and system leaders for over 15 years in all education sectors in a number of states and in New Zealand. Tracey works extensively with schools, principal and assistant principal networks throughout Australia and leaders in other sectors.

Tracey is a former assistant principal in the government sector in Victoria, Australia. She has also worked as a project manager in the automotive industry, as part of the Teacher Release to Industry Program and as a business manager in a fine dining restaurant.

This is Tracey's third book. Her first books are *The Buzz – Creating a Thriving and Collaborative Staff Learning Culture* designed for education leaders to support schools to bring about transformation in the classroom and *Glue: The Stuff that Binds Us Together to do Extraordinary Work* for leaders across all sectors who want to lift beyond convention to create high performing teams.

Tracey was awarded a National Fellowship by the Australian Council of Educational Leaders in 2020.

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