

January 2018:

As part of the *Café Insights* series of interviews with inspiring speakers, The Insight Bureau recently caught up with Margie Warrell, the best-selling author and Forbes contributor and an expert in leadership and organisational change. Her work and her writings are all around Fear, how this can hold us back from being our best, but really need not do so.



- Andrew Vine** Hello and welcome to another in the series of Café Insights. I'm Andrew Vine, CEO of The Insight Bureau, and today, I'm in conversation with Margie Warrell. How are you?
- Margie Warrell** I'm great, Andrew.
- AV** Good. Now you're a best-selling author, you contribute to Forbes Magazine, and you comment on various leadership issues, and the books you've written -- in fact, I think there are four: *Find Your Courage*, *Stop Playing Safe*, *Brave*, *Make Your Mark* [laughter], pretty much defines what you talk about, right?
- MW** Can you pick up on a thread through all of that?
- AV** Yes [laughter]. So I know you've lived in Australia -- you're from Australia originally -- you've spent quite a bit of time in the United States, and now you live in Singapore. So I'm interested to know what's brought you to where you are today? What have you done?
- MW** I think a sense of adventure, probably, and honestly, just a passion for experiencing and supporting other people in their work and impact which has really had me living in all these places around the world, and who knows where next?
- AV** Well, I know that you've done a lot of research yourself, and you've drawn on the research of others, around the psychology of leadership and this asset of being brave, being bold.
- MW** Look, any organisation is made up of individuals, and the core of us as individuals is like this wrestling match between our desire for growth, and contribution, and, I guess, a sense of meaning, and also this desire for safety and security, and protecting our reputation and the power that we have right now. And so when it comes to really unlocking the potential within an individual, or a team, or an organisation, to me the biggest threat is always the fear that resides within its walls. So where does fear keep people from stepping into uncertainty, from taking a risk, from speaking up and challenging the status quo, from trying things that haven't been done before and risking mistakes? My work is ultimately about helping grow individual organizational capacity for change, for achievement, for performing at other levels, and also for creativity and innovation. And given the heightened rate of uncertainty and also the change in the world today, organisations that aren't constantly challenging how things are being done, experimenting with new ways of doing things, they're not able to compete at the same level with those that can. So how do you create a culture where people are willing to try new things and to do that?
- AV** And we can be forgiven here because it seems, from what I've heard, is that we're essentially wired to avoid pain and to avoid risk.

- MW** Yeah. Hence that wrestling match. It's like, "Oh, I know I really want to do this, but I also don't want to risk messing up, failing, making an idiot of myself. No, don't put my reputation on the line. I want to put my team's on the line." And so that's where the role of leaders is so important because leaders are essentially an emotional barometer. And people are looking at them, particularly through times of change, like, "What are they doing?" They set out the signals, the cues, as to how we should be dealing with the change that's going on around us. And so, our ability to lead others is ultimately determined by our ability to lead ourselves. And that's where, to me, if you have a group of people who are charged with leading change project, leading a team, leading an organisation, what are they doing to ultimately make sure they're bringing their best self to the game, their bravest self, making decisions that aren't being piloted purely by fear of what could go wrong, but also by a sense of purpose to make things more right?
- AV** Yep. I remember we had a conversation earlier about how, in organisations, building the 'currency of trust' is an important development of organisation. And that's kind of linked to this trust.
- MW** Yeah, absolutely. Well, if you think of trust is-- I mean it's really the foundation stone for relationships. Imagine if you could really trust that the people around you would do what they knew is the right thing, that they had the competence to do it, that they would speak the truth and be frank about things in respectful ways. Imagine if you were working with everybody who was like that. So that currency of trust, individuality and collectively, allows us to get more done. But so often, the trust is damaged because people don't manage their commitments, they don't speak truthfully, they don't take care of the concerns of others, or certainly, people don't perceive that they would take care of them, and they wouldn't necessarily do what was right over what was convenient.
- AV** And some of the bravest things are to not do things or to speak up.
- MW** Sometimes knowing that someone would be willing to actually lay their reputation on the line and take a hit because they didn't believe in it-- they're the kind of people that we want to work with, that we want to work for, that we want to have on our team. But we need to, obviously, role model that ourselves. And you see a lot of times it's just easier to roll over. But at what cost? At what cost is it to you individually, to your team, when people are just going along, going with the flow saying "Yes" versus having the guts to say, "No, I disagree. No, I think we should rethink this."
- AV** Yeah. You also do quite a bit of work within women circles in business. You're an Ambassador for Women in Global Business in Australia and the UN National Committee, I know. So do you see that this is an area where good progress is being made or we've still got a long way to go?
- MW** I think both. I think there's been a lot of progress, and obviously, just in recent months with all of the revelations and this massive movement really around women, and women and safety, and the whole "Me-Too" movement, clearly, there's a conversation going on that hasn't gone on at the level it's going on before. But do we still have a long way to go? Absolutely. There's a massive way to go. And I think this goes both ways, and it's not only having more women seated at the table -- and I am passionate about supporting women in leadership to earn their value and really exercise their power to affect change -- but also it has to be it's okay for men to make the choices that we've often assumed that women will make in terms of helping take care of kids on the home front too. So I think what does it mean for gender equality? It means more than just empowering women. And I think it's certainly something that both men and women have to be engaged in. But my experience, having worked with thousands of women around the world, is that it was not only a gender gap but a gender confidence gap, women tend to doubt themselves more, back themselves less. So often, we apologise for our opinion before we've even spoken it, and we don't always step in, and speak up, and even ask for what we want. But I think it's really important conversation because I have no doubt that the more we can really embrace feminine leadership traits in any team and organisation, the stronger those organisations will be and the better decisions they'll make.

- AV** Well, I think, generally, it's been proven time and again that greater diversity within boards on management groups, within teams, has so much benefit.
- MW** Yeah, absolutely. I mean it's a complex issue, and there's no one solution. It's not about, "Okay, ladies, find your courage and speak up and problem solved." But I absolutely think that's a part of it. And I think also, just often, my experience with men is that they don't always see the issue. They don't understand why women struggle so much, and sometimes I think there's a frustration. So I think that's where having an environment that's very inclusive, where there's a lot of conversations going on, and there's a real shared commitment to creating psychological safety within the culture of a team and organisation, but also to emboldening people and giving them an opportunity to leverage their strengths.
- AV** Yeah. And now I was also wondering because you've worked in Australia, and you've worked in the US, and now you're here in Asia. Do you see that some of the challenges that individuals face in terms of being more assertive, and standing up for their beliefs, and being bold and brave, do you think that this is more difficult because of the cultural backgrounds that people have?
- MW** Absolutely. Yeah, absolutely. I mean, we cannot be impacted by the culture that we've grown up in and been socialised in, and so-- is this an issue in Asia? Absolutely, because there's a lot of Western companies here that have this different culture. But for people to thrive in those organisations, they have to know how to adapt their behaviour. And being subservient and being compliant isn't behaviours that are going to be rewarded in companies that have that, 'we want people to challenge, to think, to innovate, to push back'. So I think it's really important that, frankly, everybody is mindful of the cultural differences. We need to be respectful of that. But also [look towards?] what does it take for people to thrive and to get ahead? And you don't want to have people not sharing what they're brilliant at because they are afraid of doing so. I know, even in Australia growing up, I grew up on a small dairy farm in rural Australia, there's a thing called the tall poppy syndrome in my family growing up, and my dad was a dairy farmer... honestly, you didn't want to aim to be anything too big because you would be told you were up yourself. So even growing up in the Australian context and being bold and ambitious, in my family, and in certainly where I grew up, wasn't something that was encouraged. So I think that's where it's not about being brash or brazen, but it is about not letting fear of what other people will think, or fear of failure, fear of losing face, keep us from speaking up and daring to do the things that inspire us and actually to be change-makers in our own right.
- AV** Brilliant. Well, thank you very much for spending some time with us. We're just starting 2018 now. What have you got to look forward to?
- MW** Oh, plenty of things. I'm working on my doctorate, so ...
- AV** Yes of course, so you'll soon be Doctor Margie.
- MW** I've got a little way to go yet, but that's certainly going to take up a little bit of time. And in between that, a lot of speaking, travelling, running programmes around the world, actually, and juggling my four kids in the process.
- AV** Lovely. All right. Great to see you. Thank you very much for your time.
- MW** My pleasure, Andrew.

Margie Warrell is a speaker and author. Her four books are  
***"Find Your Courage; Stop Playing Safe: Brave: Make Your Mark"***

To learn more about Margie's Warrell's experience and insight, visit:  
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