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WOUNDED HEALER

Clare Gerada: Tips for surviving leadership

Clare Gerada *GP partner*

My New Year's resolution was to declutter paper and create order among my bookshelves and cupboards. As I did so I came across a sheet of paper given to me in 2010, when I became the Royal College of General Practitioners' first female chair for 50 years.

The sheet was entitled *Surviving*. The advice helped me immensely, and these are the points I would like to pass on:

- Find like minded people from within your organisation. Ask them for feedback and early warning if there are any problems.
- Create a support group of trusted friends or colleagues, or find a mentor, or even a therapist. A problem shared often really is a problem halved.
- Be a role model who others can follow, and make sure that you don't pull up the ladder after you.
- Before any significant meeting, think about what you want to achieve. Write down your aims at the top of your papers for the meeting.
- Have your own red lines that you won't cross, based on your values.
- When you're trying to convey really important messages ensure that they're properly recorded.
- Recognise that some discussions will take place in spaces you can't access—pubs, clubs, social events. It's important that you have sufficient informal one-to-one meetings with people of influence.
- Deal with overt discrimination. A good technique is successive questioning: "Could you clarify what exactly you mean?" And keep your cool.
- After a difficult meeting or media appearance, especially in the public domain, it's normal to feel upset. Try to give yourself some downtime to recover.
- There will be times when you haven't handled yourself well. Reflect and learn from them, but don't beat yourself up. Be open about your failings.
- If something has gone badly, ask others close to you not to comment immediately. You know that it didn't go well; what you want from them is support.
- When speaking publicly try not to speak too quickly, don't raise your voice, prepare in your head what you want to say, and be aware of your body language.
- If you're being bullied, step back, recognise the tactic, and devise ways of countering it—as you would in a difficult consultation.
- Be prepared to be a (subtle) self-publicist.
- Keep personal issues to yourself. Don't indulge in gossip.
- Keep a diary: it helps you afterwards to reflect, learn, and understand what really went on.

I do hope that this list helps. Good luck with your leadership journey. You will not only survive but thrive.

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Clare Gerada is chair of Doctors in Distress and medical director of NHS Practitioner Health. Her new book, *Beneath the White Coat: Doctors, their Minds and Mental Health*, is published by Routledge and can be purchased at <https://www.routledge.com/Beneath-the-White-Coat-Doctors-Their-Minds-and-Mental-Health/Gerada/p/book/9781138499737>. All royalties will be donated to Doctors in Distress.

I thank Dr J G for the first version of how to survive in leadership.