

## FEELING UNDERMINED

### **Where do you find the inner strength to cope with criticism or being undermined?**

Every leader has moments when they feel beleaguered and the butt of criticism. Angry comments on social media pierce their equilibrium. They may begin to doubt themselves and feel there is no one they can trust. How do we keep going when we feel isolated and vulnerable?

We both learnt a lot about resilience working for a leader subjected to unfair and unwarranted tabloid attacks. He focused on the decisions he needed to make and was utterly professional in his dealings with those who criticised him behind his back. We know various leaders who have trained themselves not to look at social media comments on their leadership and ask a colleague to filter key messages they should be aware of.

### **We notice that leaders who handle criticism effectively have developed:**

- a clear sense of purpose and focus in their work, and an understanding of the expectations that go with their roles
- the ability to prepare themselves emotionally for times when their decisions and approach are unpopular.
- a network of colleagues who provide voices of realism and encouragement- and are not afraid to suggest a change of course if that's needed
- a set of personal beliefs and values to live by, and
- a hinterland outside work where they are engaged in life and relationships that absorb and refresh them.

**Inner strength can come from personal beliefs and values, from clarity of intent, from past experiences and from the support of others.** Sometimes that inner strength is pushed to the limits in a fast moving and aggressive context. The result can be disturbed sleep, irritability or intense anxiety. This is the moment to stand back, notice what is happening, and draw on all their wisdom about wellbeing and resilience. For some it is deep, slow breathing, for others a burst of vigorous exercise: whatever works.

One leader talks of recognising that when she is 'on the pitch', some folk will be cheering her on and others will be yelling at her – and that's normal. She has learnt to live with a febrile and tense atmosphere in a competitive environment. Key to her wellbeing is to know that she has another life where she is a spectator, or on a 'different pitch'. She has the inner security of knowing that her family and friends appreciate who she is as a person. She does not let herself be defined by her work role or reputation.