

“Bravery will take you far,”

SAYS HEALTH SYSTEM PRESIDENT OF STRATEGY

Annette M. Walker lifts up those around her and shares life lessons in courage, confidence, and empowerment.

Annette M. Walker grew up the younger sister to three brothers she cherished and with whom she wanted to spend as much time as possible. That frequently meant climbing trees, skateboarding, or participating in some death-defying act or another. She opted into each of these activities with enthusiasm, even if a little healthy fear simmered below the surface.

“I just had to stick my neck out and do it,” she recalls. “I couldn’t let them see that I was scared. I had to be brave.”

Today, Walker, who holds a master’s degree in health administration, is President of Strategy, Providence St. Joseph Health. She believes strongly in the value of bravery and that it’s an essential characteristic for all who hope to advance in their careers, especially women.

The Importance of Being Brave

“It’s in our nature to wait for the invitation to participate rather than to claim our seats at the table outright,” Walker says. “It’s a brave woman who takes a risk, who doesn’t wait to be asked her opinion, but instead steps up and provides it freely and with confidence.”

For Walker, bravery demonstrates

presence, engagement, and the desire to make a difference. When one demonstrates bravery in the workplace, she says, they are more likely to be remembered and sought out for future opportunities.

As an example of bravery demonstrated in her own career, Walker points to an opportunity once given to her by a former boss. She seized the opportunity to manage a project that was entirely unformed and unscripted. It was daunting, of course, and she admits there were times her bravery—her confidence—wavered. She found herself on more than one occasion calculating the personal risks she was exposing herself to should she fail.

“There was definitely some soul searching on my part. I wondered at times if it was worth putting myself on the line for. What if I failed?” she says. “A mentor assured me that as long as my actions weren’t reckless, it would all be OK. And it was all OK. Sometimes being brave, I believe, means recognizing that failure can happen and still being brave enough to dive in head-first.”

Empowering Others to Speak Courageously

Another of Walker’s passions is lifting up the people around her. It’s more



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— ANNETTE M. WALKER, MHA

than just mentoring, she explains. She describes what she does as sponsoring, in which she seeks to find or create opportunities for those with professional ambitions. Walker is open to mentoring—or sponsoring—everyone she works with, men and women alike.

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One frequent roadblock she encounters with those she mentors is a lack of confidence in speaking up and speaking out.

“Public speaking is one area in which many lack confidence, especially those who have less experience in the workforce. But confidence is built through small tests. With each test they pass, confidence grows, until a level of competence is developed. Confidence comes when someone realizes and understands their competence and can put it to work. I’ll be there every step of the way, cheering them on and encouraging their progress and making available any resources I can,” says Walker.

Walker is particularly interested in working with other women as a mentor, as she is eager to share her experiences in balancing career and family in a way that’s useful to others.

“Women shouldn’t have to choose between work and family, and many women don’t have a choice,” says Walker, the mother of six, grandmother

of 10, and wife to husband Chuck, whom she describes as a devoted co-parent. “Every young woman out there needs to know that with creativity and passion she can make

it work. I encourage everyone to bravely pursue every opportunity, professional and personal, to stand up and use their voice, and to take their place at the table.”

Recognized in the Healthcare Community

Walker’s passion for developing teams and her expertise in the healthcare space have afforded her opportunities to author numerous articles on the promotion of healthcare quality and to speak before numerous national healthcare organizations. She has received national honors for her work and leadership and was named one of Modern Healthcare’s Top 25 Women in Healthcare in 2017. Walker was also honored with Orange Catholic Foundation’s 2017 Bishop’s Award for Exemplary Business Integrity and recognized by the Los Angeles Business Journal as Executive of the Year of 2017. She earned Orange County Business Journal’s Innovator of the Year award in 2016 and Modern Healthcare’s

Innovation in Healthcare Technology Award, as well as the Society for Healthcare Strategy and Market Development’s Banner Award, the California Hospital Association’s Ritz E. Herman Innovator Award, and Hospitals & Health Networks’ Innovator Award.

Walker currently sits on the board of directors of the Well Being Trust, a national foundation dedicated to advancing the mental, social, and spiritual health of the nation, and the SJH Community Partnership Fund, which awards grants to organizations that work to improve access to quality healthcare, food, shelter, and other aspects of social well-being for the most vulnerable in the communities serviced by Providence St. Joseph Health.