

Love is Greater than Fear

*May I have the courage today, To live the life that I would love,
To postpone my dream no longer, But do at last what I came here for,
And waste my heart on fear no more.*

– John O'Donoghue

At one of the lowest points of his life, Loren Shook went to a retreat high in the California mountains. Two days later, he was a man committed to change.

Loren was already a successful entrepreneur. He had built a flourishing business dedicated to giving meaning to the lives of people with Alzheimer's and other memory-impairing diseases.

However, he was living with a sense of failure. Despite his professional success, his marriage was ending. And he had an uneasiness and dissatisfaction about decisions he was making. His long-time friend and executive coach, Vance Caesar, was about to change that.

Every year, Vance invited Loren to take part in a weekend men's retreat in the San Jacinto Mountains. After years of politely declining, Loren surprised himself by accepting the offer.

That Saturday, he and a dozen other business leaders arrived at a lodge perched between two expanses of towering rock. The setting seemed to be nature's way of encouraging introspection. When Vance beckoned the men into a circle in the living room and began talking about happiness, Loren was ready to listen to Vance explain that throughout the centuries, great philosophers and religious leaders have concluded there are two core emotions from which all other feelings spring – Love and Fear. He elaborated, "Those who achieve the most happiness have based their decisions and actions on love, not fear. They have acted in the best interest of the people around them rather than in fear, anger, and defensiveness – negative emotions which arise when we feel threatened or unsure of ourselves."

Looking intently at each man, he added, "Most of us grew up with fear. It wasn't the A on the report card that got our parents' attention; it was the C. In a sense, it was their fear speaking – if you failed, it meant they had failed.

"As adults," Vance continued, "we perpetuate our childhood experiences. Looking around the room, I see overachievers who have allowed fear to shape countless decisions leading to current circumstances."

Vance let that sink in and then approached an issue that is difficult for men. "Might you accomplish more by accepting love as your navigator? If you will choose to live your life based on love, you will find people are drawn to you. You will develop better relationships. You will be happier in your personal life. This is the challenge: Stop living a life shaped by fear. Dare to change and let love be your guide."

The words hit Loren like a lightning bolt. From the earliest days of his childhood, his will to succeed by doing the right thing had characterized his life. No one could argue with its effectiveness. It had brought him undeniable success.

But at that moment at the lodge, Loren realized there is only one way to truly know what the right thing is – by making choices and acting on the greatest positive emotion: Love.

As he reflected on Vance's words, he knew it was too late to cope with his failed marriage, and he didn't know if he could treat every single future decision with love. But he wanted to try it. A phrase flashed in his mind, which would become his polestar.

Love is greater than fear.

On the drive down the mountain, Loren resolved to tell Silverado's executive team about the concept.

But when the company vice presidents gathered at the monthly meeting in the corporate conference room, the normally punctual Loren retreated twice to his desk before summoning the courage to leave his office.

"They're going to think I'm nuts," he thought. "Guys don't talk about love." Then, bracing himself, he countered, "Loren, you're a chicken, a gutless wonder, reacting from fear. You need to come from love. So you're going to bring it up." And he did.

Surprised silence and impassive expressions greeted Loren's talk about love being greater than fear. A few faces turned ashen and others smiled cautiously when he finished by proposing that Silverado adopt the concept as its core operating principle. With Loren's prodding, discussion ensued and, eventually, the executives reached a consensus: The idea was good, but it would be better if "love" weren't involved. Perhaps "like" or "strongly like" might take its place.

"But this is exactly the point," Loren said. "We're all afraid of the word 'love.' Think about it: we want the staff to do 'the right thing' with our residents. But it's just a hollow phrase if they don't have the criteria for determining it. As the company expands, it will be hard for newer employees to understand and carry out our vision. But if we tell our employees to serve residents from the standpoint of love, they will naturally fulfill our expectations."

Steve was intrigued by the concept and the teachings behind it. After the meeting, he went to the library to find out more and came home with an armload of books. He quickly saw how beneficial it would be for the company.

Loren set about introducing *Love is greater than fear* throughout Silverado. He brought the same fire to this endeavor that he had brought to building the company

from scratch. He dedicated time to group training and one-on-one conversations with staff.

At first, some in management resisted the philosophy, fearing to give up control with the new approach. Loren recalls, they would ask, "Why risk it when everything is going so well?"

On the other hand, the caregivers, housekeepers, culinary staff, maintenance people, and others who work most directly with residents responded without hesitation. "Of course we will act through love. That's why we're here."

Employees began saying that *Love is greater than fear* was changing their lives at home as well as in the workplace. It was helping them to communicate with spouses and children and to mend relationships damaged by anger and regret.

Loren knew this principle had the power to improve life for everyone, regardless of financial status or personal circumstances. Years later, he remains awed by its powerful reach. He is convinced that *Love is greater than fear* can yield remarkable transformations on a wide scale.

As evidence of this, professional associations and boards of directors at other companies frequently invite him to speak. As he discusses Silverado and its vision of creating a better life for the memory impaired, he asserts, "It's impossible to understand Silverado without knowing its guiding principle." When someone responds, "I would love to do this at my business, but I wouldn't dare," it fills him with regret, because he knows they are motivated by fear.

People who have known Loren a long time can see that *Love is greater than fear* has wrought a major change in him. Loren's moral compass had never been in doubt, but he began to measure his words more carefully, and many times to soften his tone. He was quicker to trust and forgive. Even his body seemed looser, in greater sync with his emotional and physical surroundings.

"Think of it as a scale," he suggests, "with fear at zero and love at 100. If you can make love-based choices 85 to 90 percent of the time, then for you, *Love is greater than fear*. This is what we believe, what we live by at Silverado. It's what I've committed my life to."