



By [Karen Clark Cole](#)

Fierce, Inc. is a global leadership development and training company that improves communication between people. Fierce principles and methods translate across the globe, and help develop skills that are practical, easy-to-learn, and can be applied immediately. Success is equally as immediate, and clients benefit tremendously due to improved interpersonal relationships for employees and the people they interact with on a daily basis.

As part of Blink UX's employee development program, we all read the book *Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success at Work and in Life One Conversation at a Time* by Susan Scott. The master teacher of positive change through powerful communication, Scott wants her readers to succeed. To do this, she explains, one must transform everyday conversations employing effective ways to communicate.

Karen Clark Cole, CEO and co-founder of Blink UX, holds closely to the 7 Fierce Principles in her work and life. In fact, she has them posted on her office wall. I asked her some questions about how she applies them:

How did you get involved with Fierce? What attracted you to the program?

I met [Halley Bock, president and CEO of Fierce, Inc.](#) when she presented at my Women Presidents' Organization meeting and immediately loved the concepts. During her presentation, Halley talked about committing to one-on-one time with people on a regular basis. I saw huge value in this simple idea, and immediately started scheduling regular one-on-one meetings with my employees. The only hard part was finding the time to do that. I decided to make it a real priority and now block an entire week in my calendar for these meetings twice a year. I also have weekly meetings with some of the leadership people in the company.

As well as those scheduled meetings, my door is always open and I encourage anyone to stop by and talk whenever they want to. In every meeting I always commit to being fully present and move into side-by-side chairs, away from my desk and computer. It's extremely important to me to show respect for that person's time and their concerns. While most of this is common sense and what I have always done naturally, the Fierce Principles gave me the data behind what I was doing, helped me fine-tune it to become deliberate and prioritize. The Fierce tools also help me educate others on these ideas. I have several copies of the book that I give out on a regular basis and earmark certain pages for people.

What were your goals when you started using Fierce principles company-wide?

My goal was to have everyone in the company communicating better. The principles are so great because they are easy to understand and can be used right away. I asked everyone to read the book *Fierce Conversations* - because it deepens the understanding of how to communicate in an honest and sincere way. You don't even have to read the book end to end to get it - Most of the ideas are bite-sized. It's not obvious for everyone, especially with so much email now a days, that important and difficult conversations need to be in person. I encourage the Blink staff to think twice about emailing someone, and instead, to get up and walk over to the person's desk and have a real, live, in-person conversation.

You have the 7 Fierce Principles on the wall of your office. Can you tell me a little bit more about them, and why?

They help keep the principles top of mind and I show them to other people quite a bit. I often pick one and think about it for the day. In cases where I'm having a specific challenge and a principle applies, I will often grab the book and read more about that specific principle to help me through the issue. Each principle has different meanings at different times. All seven principles require practice and constant awareness, and I work hard and train myself to be good at communicating well. It's an art for sure.

How have the principles changed the way you lead? The way you live?

I live more clearly. I didn't used to have words to tell someone about his or her own impact, and now I can really frame it up quickly and clearly. This is helpful for both parties.

Principle #6 (Take responsibility for your emotional wake) is a great example: It really resonates with me as someone who has grown professionally with my role at Blink changing over the last 14 years. I know now that sometimes what I don't say has as big of an impact as what I do say. I try to teach other leaders at Blink that they have this type of impact as well, and that they need to take it seriously and be aware of the emotional wake they may cause - both good and bad.

Does any one principle resonate more with you? Rise above the rest?

I have two favorites: #3 (Be here, be prepared to be nowhere else) and #6 (Take responsibility for your emotional wake). They are always top-of-mind for me. I expect these of myself and expect them of others around me as well – both at work and at home.

Can you tell me a story or about a situation where you used a Fierce Principle to good effect? What did you do? What happened?

#3 and #6 again—Being present and responsible are how I am in meetings. I ask people to come prepared to be the same. It really comes down to respecting each other. If someone has planned a meeting, they have something to say and everyone who agrees to attend should listen and participate in that meeting as though it's the most important thing they could be doing at that time. If they can't honestly say that to themselves, they should not attend, and that's okay.

When everyone is fully present in the meeting, it allows us to be more efficient, engaged, and productive. People need to be heard to feel valued. When your job in a meeting is to fully listen and engage, it makes it a whole lot easier than when you are expected to multi-task, resulting in two or three things done half-heartedly. When people are engaged, you get things done; have more interesting, richer conversations and better results.

Has using Fierce principles helped resolve issues?

Having a difficult conversation is not something people usually look forward to, but I've learned that using the Fierce tools, with lots of practice, it gets much easier: The more you do it, the less daunting it becomes. The outcome is so incredibly worth it, that you begin to look forward to the outcome and start to feel less overwhelmed about the process. It becomes more of a positive thing. *Fierce Conversations* gave us the courage to acknowledge the reasons why we didn't look forward to difficult conversations, and gave us the courage and tools to get through it. We know it's going to be hard and that's okay.

Below are the 7 Fierce Principles that Karen recommends to live by:

Principle 1: Master the courage to interrogate reality.

Principle 2: Come out from behind yourself into the conversation and make it real

Principle 3: Be here, be prepared to be nowhere else.

Principle 4: Tackle your toughest challenge today.

Principle 5: Obey your instincts.

Principle 6: Take responsibility for your emotional wake.

Principle 7: Let silence do the heavy lifting.

Fierce, Inc. is located in downtown Seattle. To learn more about Fierce, The 7 Principles, and the book *Fierce Conversations*, please visit <https://fierceinc.com/>.