

# UMBrella

## Germer Inspires in UMBrella Event



Put on your shoes. That's the first step in building a satisfying life in which you reach your potential, Fawn Germer told a crowd at UMB on April 21, 2016.

It was also one of many memorable phrases of encouragement passed along by the nationally respected author, speaker, and business consultant.

Part of the University's UMBrella (UMB Roundtable on Empowerment in Leadership and Leveraging Aspirations) Speaker Series, Germer's presentation urged the audience to not be afraid to fail. "Risk taking is the only way to test your potential," she said.

She used many incidents from her own life to support her point.

***Don't let security be your dangerous anchor.***

Germer began her career as an investigative reporter at the *Rocky Mountain News* in Denver. She found her path to advancement blocked by a difficult boss who said she'd always be "just a reporter." So she took a risk and "bet on herself," accepting a job at the *Tampa Tribune* as an editor that required a different skill set than being a "hard-charging, just the facts" reporter.

Looking for help to make her "Dale Carnegie" transformation, Germer searched for a book on how to be an effective, strong woman in a male-dominated field — and found none. "A friend said, 'You're a journalist; write it,'" Germer recalled. "I was sick of people writing books about things they know nothing about. But I thought I am a journalist and no one has gone to the strongest women of our time and asked them what did you learn the hard way that might make it easier on the rest of us."

Her first book, *Hard Won Wisdom*, came from interviews from these 50-plus successful women. But the book didn't enjoy the instant success Germer envisioned. After all, she said, it takes obstacles to find success.

***If you aren't failing a little, you don't know your limits.***

Oceanographer Sylvia Earle told Germer of a failed business idea when Earle was in her 60s that took every dime she had. When Germer asked if she was bitter, Earle said, "No, look what I learned. I can always make more money later."

Thus inspired, Germer quit her job at the *Tampa Tribune* the next day so she could focus on completing the book. "Which was rejected by every publisher in the U.S.," Germer told the audience. Then more bad luck. Later, Germer having found a publisher, the book was released the day before 9/11, limiting her promotional opportunities.

But Germer didn't learn to "fall down seven times, get up eight" by accepting defeat. So she persevered, eventually attracting the notice of the book community, including Oprah Winfrey, with her first of eight books and launching a successful career as a motivational speaker.

"It really is all about the obstacles," Germer said. "All these things pushed me to where I am. The *Rocky Mountain News* died. If I had stayed in that 'secure' job, I would have nothing."

***You'll never learn to fly if you won't jump off the cliff.***

So Germer has spread her wings, sky-diving to celebrate her 50th birthday, becoming a long-distance cyclist and hiker. She traveled to India — alone. All in her quest to reach self-fulfillment. She urged those in the audience to do the same, pointing out how far women have come.

"In my lifetime there were states that wouldn't let women sit on juries. Where you couldn't get birth control unless you were married. If a woman was beaten they'd say what did you do to provoke that, if a woman was raped they'd say why did you wear that.

"The world has changed. It is different. You can see now how women are starting to learn how much more power we have by supporting each other. That's amazing. That's what you can do for each other."

Group support is a basic tenet of UMBrella, which was launched last year to help UMB women achieve their potential, find their voices, and feel empowered. The group works to engage a community that supports the success of women, that advances women into leadership roles at UMB, and that champions women at all levels of its organization.

***Every mountaintop is within reach if you keep climbing.***

Germer also touched upon self-esteem and self-confidence. She reminded the audience "we all are flawed. But we have a choice. We can either show up all the way or hold yourself back because of your flaws, which aren't any worse than anyone else's."

She drew a *Wizard of Oz* analogy and urged those assembled to "click their heels." She said to "never waste a sunset," and "go outside and breathe" when feeling overwhelmed because nature is a wonderful elixir.

Mortality broadsided Germer in 2013 when, within the span of a few months, Germer's seven-year relationship ended, her mother, then her father died, and a close friend sold her a house that had a myriad of expensive and hidden problems.

Even the usually upbeat Germer was plunged into depression ... until she put on her shoes.

Over the course of two weeks, she walked more than 70 miles of beach near her home in Pinellas County, Fla. Along the route she found herself — her previous happy self — again.

"Sometimes you have to disengage, mark an end to what's not working," Germer said after a short video of her recharging beach walk that inspired her latest book, *Reset*.

"Just make your mind up you're going to be happy every day of your life. While on the beach I thought 'Thank you God for giving me this life.' And I heard something inside of me say 'You chose this life.' So what are you choosing? Are you actively taking power, are you risking things so you can be truly happy? Do you believe in yourself, are you being kind to yourself? Because if not, today is a great place to start. All you have to do is put on your shoes."

- Chris Zang