

BEING VULNERABLE BUILDS WORK RELATIONSHIPS



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I was vying for a position in “corporate” that would round out my experience for something bigger later on. The manager who was interviewing me gave the most grueling interview I’d ever had. His intensity in interviews was the stuff of legends, and I wasn’t given a break.

I got the job, and came to realize this guy was actually a great leader and a joy to work for. In short, he was willing to be vulnerable. I thrived, as did the rest of the team, and it was one of the most enjoyable jobs I’d ever had due to this man and the connections that he fostered among us. Beyond his gruff exterior, he had a soft heart, was willing to be wrong and to not know all of the answers. And yes – he still demanded results and got them.

Brene’ Brown, a social scientist, speaker, and best-selling author, describes vulnerability as lying at the heart of great relationships. It is not about being “weak” (which is what most think it means), but a willingness to be genuine and real.

Yet it’s not uncommon for leaders to hold back, showing toughness and foregoing the genuine connection that vulnerability creates in order to avoid being seen as weak. Contrary to popular belief, being vulnerable – showing your real self – is an act of courage that engages others and forges connections that foster trust. Leaders who have the courage to be vulnerable are willing to admit they don’t have all the answers, and that sometimes they don’t even know the questions to ask.

The road to being more vulnerable and authentic can begin here:



Noticing your emotions: Beneath your tough exterior, you might be avoiding an acknowledgment that you have an emotional life too. Think about it: how many times have you felt something for a family member who is struggling? Those same emotions that have appeared at home but get buried at work have a place in building strong, trusting relationships.



Sharing your feelings: Opening up to let others know that you too have insecurities. Letting others know that you are happy, sad, or concerned about something or someone is a courageous act that binds others to you. They can see you as human, and that creates a shared experience that almost anyone can connect to.



Admitting when you don’t have the answers: This is a challenge in organizations that reward your knowledge. Admitting that there is something you don’t know is honest and real because nobody can know everything. Rather than making up an answer, “not knowing” creates trust in the shared experiences of travelling the path of the unknown.



Showing compassion: Your employees appreciate it when you show compassion for their situation. This might include expressing your gratitude that you are asking them to put in extra time to meet a deadline, or helping them out in some way when their personal lives are impacted by unfortunate events. Compassion is an act of vulnerability that connects us all to the human condition.

Being vulnerable isn’t a weakness, but rather an act of courage that binds people together into relationships built on trust. Without it, you are just working. With it, you work as a caring and engaged team.