

A WEEK IN *Learning*

THE TRUTH BEHIND VULNERABILITY

Holly Schor, Vice President of Maryland Operations

“To feel is to be vulnerable. Believing that Vulnerability is a weakness is believing that Feeling is a weakness.” - Brene Brown

These powerful words stem from the works of Brene Brown, a researcher and storyteller who has produced groundbreaking research on a variety of human emotions. Through her work, Brene dives deep into real and relatable human experiences – including her most influential understandings on vulnerability.

I am a huge fan of Brene Brown, for many reasons. She is brave and honest with her words and I have found her topics timely for my own personal growth. I recently read her book, *Dare to Lead* with some of my colleagues, which provided additional perspectives on her work around vulnerability. Many of us grew up programed to think that vulnerability is a sign of weakness. However, Brene demonstrates a different side of vulnerability that can be both freeing and courageous.

Perceptions of Vulnerability

As I have gotten older (and maybe a little more secure with who I am) I find it refreshing when I can be vulnerable with others. It is my goal as a leader to create an environment where people trust me enough to practice being vulnerable around me. However, it's not always easy to start – vulnerability can be uncomfortable.

For some people, vulnerability comes naturally. For others, it can be difficult. Why? Well, it might be based on how we were raised. Brene Brown points out that, *“For those of us who were raised with a healthy (or unhealthy) dose of **suck it up or get ‘er done**, rumbling with vulnerability is a challenge.”* When I looked up the definition of vulnerable, it's all negative. Words like wounded or attacked, damage or criticism are called out. No wonder it's not easy to be open and vulnerable! What I love about Brene's idea of vulnerability is that she puts a different spin on what vulnerable means. Yes, it does mean feeling emotions like fear, shame, grief, disappointment, and sadness. But in Brene's work, it is also defined as the cornerstone to **courage, creativity, belonging, and joy.**



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- *Holly Schor*

Becoming More Vulnerable

So how do you practice being vulnerable? Here are a couple of key takeaways that I have learned from Brene's work that may help you get started:

1. **Clear is Kind, Unclear is Unkind.** Be clear in your intent or expectations. This is not always an easy thing to do. It is easier to "sugar coat things" because it makes us feel better delivering a difficult message. Not getting clear with a colleague about your expectations because it feels too hard, yet holding them accountable or blaming them for not delivering, is unkind. Talking about people rather than to them is unkind. All of this takes practice. I have found that the clearer I am, the better my relationships become. It's awkward at first, especially if you are a person who wants to be liked by others, but I have found being real and sharing clear thoughts and expectations actually can bring you closer to people.
2. **Circle back.** When having difficult conversations, whether you're on the giving or receiving end, you may feel compelled to keep pushing through. Brene recommends that unless there is an urgent, time sensitive issue at hand it's okay to circle back on the conversation after a break – maybe it's a few hours or maybe it's the next day. This will give everyone time to think through what was discussed and come back with a clearer, open mind.
3. **Create a Practice of Writing "Permission Slips".** A permission slip is when you allow someone to feel or act a certain way. Think of it as an intention for how you would like to act in difficult situations. Permission slips in meetings or interactions with others provides the participants with an opportunity to express something they will do (or feel) during the meeting. It creates an honest, safe environment to support one another. Maybe you'll give yourself permission to listen, or be present for your team. The sky is the limit with this one. [Click here](#) to access Brene's Permission Slip activity for more information – and tailor it to your audience.
4. **Thank Someone for Honest Feedback.** This one I especially love and try to practice as often as I can. Giving and receiving feedback is hard. We all have had to tell someone something we knew might be a surprise or could hurt them – and I am sure we have all been on the receiving end. As hard as it is to hear, it is a gift when someone can be honest with you. You can't fix things, you can't get better, you can't grow without it. Thank that person for being honest and trusting you enough to share their feelings.

Whether you are person who is comfortable with vulnerability or not, none of this is easy. Vulnerability can be scary, but it is not the sign of weakness we have grown up believing. Courage and self-awareness are two things I have learned more about when I embrace vulnerability. Good luck on your vulnerability journey - I promise you it will be worth it!