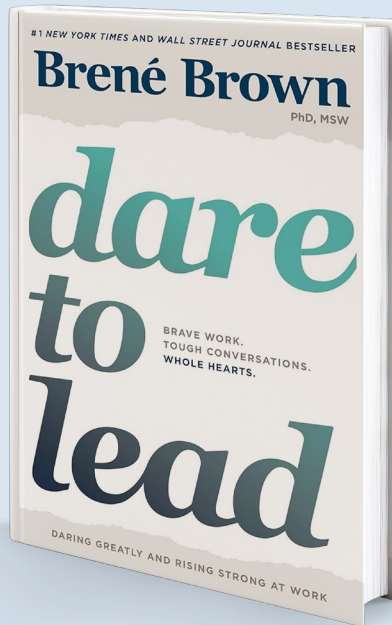


Book Snaps™

In-depth reviews of best-selling business books.



Dare to Lead

**Brave Work. Tough Conversations.
Whole Hearts**

By Brené Brown

Dr. Brené Brown is a research professor at the University of Houston, where she holds the Huffington Foundation Endowed Chair at the Graduate College of Social Work. She also holds the position of visiting professor in management at the University of Texas at Austin McCombs School of Business. Brené has spent the past two decades studying courage, vulnerability, shame, and empathy. She is the author of six #1 New York Times bestsellers and is the host of two award-winning podcasts, *Unlocking Us* and *Dare to Lead*. Brené's books have been translated into more than 30 languages.

A Book Review by Soundview

Cultivating Braver, More Daring Leaders

In her note introducing *Dare to Lead: Brave Work. Tough Conversations. Whole Hearts*, Brené Brown quotes Theodore Roosevelt as saying, “It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again...who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly.” These words form the basis for much of what Brown discusses in her book, a book in which she aims to help leaders lead more effectively, more honestly, and in a more healthy manner. Much of her book is aimed at leaders of organizations, but the information and insights can be generalized to all people who lead in any capacity, in the home, in the workplace, or in nonprofits or volunteer organizations. In fact, she defines “a leader as anyone who takes responsibility for finding the potential in people and processes, and who has the courage to develop that potential.” Courage is central to Brown’s idea of effective and healthy leadership.

Daring Leadership

Brown discusses three key concepts of daring leadership. The first pertains to the importance of “rumbling with vulnerability.” She understands that courage and fear are intimately connected. She believes that in moments when people feel vulnerable, they need “shared language, skills, tools, and daily practices” that can support them. She uses the term rumble throughout her book. For Brown, a rumble is a meeting or discussion whereby participants are committed to vulnerability, curiosity, and generosity. In a rumble, people must be adamantly committed to listening. For Brown, a person’s leadership potential is limited by the extent to which they are willing to be vulnerable.

Second, Brown states that “self-awareness and self-love matter. Who we are is how we lead.” All leaders experience fear. Fear is not the problem even though it is often the basis of many problematic behaviors. The real problem is the armor that people put on in order to deal with that fear. Brown’s third concept

related to daring leadership states that “courage is contagious.” People need to feel safe if they are going to show up without their armor, and it is the job of the leader to create that safe place. Daring leaders must “be connected to the people they lead.” She is insistent that in today’s contemptuous and adversarial culture, true leaders must hold themselves to a higher standard than that which is frequently seen in the public sphere.

Vulnerability

Brown entitles the first section of her book, “Rumbling with Vulnerability,” and she breaks this section into five subparts. Brown starts out this discussion by stating that if people are willing to put themselves out there into the world, they will inevitably fail at times. For her, vulnerability involves the willingness to go into arenas when a person cannot control how the situation will play out. She respects those willing to enter the arena. Brown does not see weakness in vulnerability; rather she believes that the decision to allow oneself to be vulnerable requires a tremendous amount of courage. Despite a desire to do so, people cannot protect themselves from being vulnerable. Some people, she claims, believe that they can protect themselves from vulnerability because they refuse to rely on other people. She insists that the science proves, however, that people are wired to need other people and community. Vulnerability is not something that can be engineered out of life.

Brown tells a story about her daughter who had her heart broken and confidence shattered when a friend shared a confidence of hers with others. Brown’s daughter said she would never trust anybody in that manner again. The two talked, however, and discussed the concept of the marble jar. A marble jar is a metaphor. When people do something kind or that builds trust, they put a marble in the metaphorical jar. When they do something that breaks trust, they take one or many marbles out of the jar. Brown encourages her daughter to stick with the people who fill up the marble jar. Brown says, “trust is the stacking and layering of small moments and reciprocal vulnerability over time. Trust and vulnerability grow together, and to betray one is to destroy the other.”

In tough conversations, Brown advocates for creating safe containers. People do this by asking others what is necessary for them to feel safe in the discussion. Another tool she advocates for using is the phrase “say more.” She says that these two words can often help teams dig deeper and get to the heart of a situation. She also believes in clarity. To Brown, “clear is kind. Unclear is unkind,” and she also encourages people to take breaks when necessary in conversations rather than trying to push through beyond what they are capable of in the moment.

Key to Brown’s discussion in other books of hers is the topic of wholeheartedness which she defines as “engaging in our lives from a place of worthiness.” She maintains that this concept requires integration of “our thinking, feelings, and behavior,” and it requires people to put aside their armor. Some organizations see feelings like vulnerability as liabilities, and in such organizations, courage can never truly thrive. A person’s ego wants to protect itself, but according to Brown, the ego is a small part of

who a person is, much smaller than their heart. She then goes into a discussion of daring and armored leadership. In each situation, she gives an example of armored leadership such as perfectionism and then the alternative daring leadership trait, in this case, healthy striving. These sixteen different examples all demonstrate how attitudes and behaviors people use as armor can be turned into behaviors and attitudes that are more healthy and daring. Daring is beneficial for Brown.

Shame and Empathy

Brown is a shame researcher, and she incorporates this research into this book on leadership. She claims that shame is a universal feeling that all people experience and usually fear speaking about. The problem is that shame becomes more powerful the more people refuse to speak about it. One time people feel shame in the workforce is when they are fired, and Brown insists that people ought to “give people a ‘way out with dignity’” when firing them from an organization. Unfortunately, nefarious factors such as armor and a lack of vulnerability tend to get in the way of this in organizations permeated by shame, and terminations can strip people of their feelings of dignity.

Empathy can help people and organizations be resilient in the face of shame. “Empathy is not connecting to an experience, it’s connecting to the emotions that underpin an experience.” It requires people to try to see situations and the world the way other people do. It also requires an attitude of non judgment as well as the communication of one’s understanding of another person’s emotional state. Empathy looks different for different people, and so a person desiring to show empathy must be aware of the emotional cues of others. Empathy is not one size fits all. Brown then discusses numerous empathetic barriers including the use of sympathy, a horrified reaction, and the desire to instantly make the situation better on the part of the listener. These barriers inhibit empathy. People can build their shame resilience and their empathy by understanding shame’s triggers, broadening their perspectives, and speaking about that which brings them shame.

Defining Values

Brown then moves on to a discussion of values. She refers back to her opening Roosevelt quote and says, “in those moments when we start putting other voices in front of our own, we forget what made us go into the arena in the first place.” She encourages people to develop clarity around their values because this clarity can help them in difficult rumbles. In order to live by one’s values, these values first must be clarified, and she says that these values are not situation specific. In other words, our values are the same in the workplace and in the home. She gives a list of dozens of values, and she insists that her reader only select two of them. She believes these values should be “a definition of who we are in our lives.” She then wants her reader to consider a few behaviors that are consistent with these values. She believes that a person can really only know another if they know their values. Organizations can take their values and turn them into operationalized behaviors that everyone is accountable to. People do not always find the benefit in discuss-



... people in a group are more likely to act courageously if they have been trained on how to rise after falling.”

ing values, but she believes this is because people do not take the necessary next step of turning them into behaviors.

Trust

In her section on trust, Brown advances Charles Feltman’s definition of trust: “choosing to risk making something you value vulnerable to another person’s actions.” At times, when people lack trust, they will discuss other people rather than discuss with other people. Trust is important because it “is the glue that holds teams and organizations together.” Brown insists that trust should be discussed in reference to specific behaviors. To talk about trust, Brown uses the BRAVING inventory. This refers to

Boundaries

Reliability

Accountability

Vault (keeping private information private)

Integrity (“choosing courage over comfort”)

Nonjudgmental

Generosity (believing the best interpretation of a person’s intentions).

Brown encourages teams to consider behaviors that align with these BRAVING elements. For Brown, trust is not just something between people. She believes that individuals should work on trusting themselves as well. After all, a person will find it difficult to trust others if they do not trust themselves.

Dealing with Setbacks

Brown’s last section focuses on rising again after inevitable setbacks. One of the first considerations if a person wants to help another risk failing is to make sure the person is equipped “for hard landings.” Brown’s research has taught her that many organizations attempt to help people build resilience only after they have fallen. This is the wrong timing, she insists. She believes people need to be taught how to weather hard landings before they experience them. After all, people in a group are more likely to act courageously if they have been trained on how to rise after falling. Brown maintains that as parents practice lawnmower parenting by trying to rid their children of any challenges in life, the child is not given the opportunity to learn courage.

Brown advances her process of “Learning to Rise” which has

three parts, “the reckoning, the rumble, and the revolution.” During the reckoning, a person will be in tune with how they are feeling and recognize when something is off. The person ought to be curious about this feeling even if they cannot absolutely identify it. At this point, a person should be careful to not offload this emotion onto another person. Next, people go through the rumbling and should be aware that if they do not have enough data, they will be tempted to make up stories about what has happened. The brain likes patterns, and stories give the brain patterns. The problem is that these stories are not always accurate. Still, people should listen to the story they are telling themselves before they question the story to determine what it can tell them about their lack of information and understanding of both other people and of themselves. Wisdom can be found in the delta between the stories people create and the truth. Brown maintains that in today’s world, revolution involves “taking off the armor and rumbling with vulnerability, living into our values, braving trust with open hearts, and learning to rise.”

Brené Brown has written numerous books on issues such as shame and vulnerability. In *Dare to Lead: Brave Work. Tough Conversations. Whole Hearts*, she brings those insights to the world of leadership. This can involve leadership in the business sphere but also in families and smaller organizations. For Brown, leadership requires courage, and it requires the willingness to allow oneself to be vulnerable. Leaders must be willing to enter into difficult conversations and avoid putting on the different forms of armor she discusses throughout her book. Her book describes the principles she advocates for, and she frequently refers her reader to additional tools on her website to help put her concepts into practice. Her research is based off of work she and her team have done throughout the years, and she shares it in a way that can help leaders of all kinds enter leadership with more wholeheartedness.

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