

BOOK SNAPS™

Zooming In On Your Next Read



Daring Greatly

by Brené Brown

Dr. Brené Brown is a research professor with two decades of experience studying vulnerability, shame, empathy, and courage and how those emotions impact our social, professional, personal, and familial relationships. Her training program The Daring Way™ has coached everyone from executives to soldiers, parents to business teams. As of 2020, she is the author of five #1 *New York Times* bestsellers including *Daring Greatly* and *Dare to Lead*. Her TED Talk, *The Power of Vulnerability*, ranks in the top five most viewed TED talks in the world. In *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*, Brené shows readers how shame and our inability to be vulnerable stands in our way of achieving greatness at work and at home. brenebrown.com

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What It Means to Dare Greatly Even When the Stakes Are High

Brené Brown borrowed the phrase “Daring Greatly” from a famous speech delivered by Teddy Roosevelt in 1910. In it he says that it is not the person on the outside passing judgement that counts. It is the person in the arena who “strives valiantly; who errs, who comes up short again and again.” This person knows “there is no effort without error or shortcoming.” This person spends everything in the worthwhile cause of “high achievement” and when failing, “at least fails while daring greatly...”

For Brené, this quote sums up what it means to be vulnerable, understand that both victory and defeat are equally important, and that being engaged and “all in” is everything. Daring Greatly requires courage and the willingness to engage, even when the stakes are high. We do it when we “dare to show up and let ourselves be seen.” When we practice the courage to show up in this way, we foster relationships, make the most of our finite time, and leverage our gifts to make the “unique contributions that only we can make.”

In 2010, Brené spent time with fifty Silicon Valley CEOs. She asked the then CEO of Serious Materials and *Inc.* magazine’s 2009 Entrepreneur of the Year, Kevin Surace, a question before his talk on the topic of “disruptive innovation.” The question she asked was, “What’s the most significant barrier to creativity and innovation?” After thinking for a minute, Kevin responded, “I don’t know if it has a name, but honestly, it’s the fear of introducing an idea and being ridiculed, laughed at, or belittled. If you’re willing to subject yourself to that experience, and can survive it, then it becomes the fear of failure or the fear of being wrong.” He went on to say, “... Something related to fear keeps people from going for it.” He then told Brené that he understood that she was a researcher but wasn’t sure of her field. She responded, “I study that ‘something related to fear’—I’m a shame-and-vulnerability researcher.”

Culture of ‘Never Enough’

We live in a culture of scarcity. This “never enough” problem is the driver behind such thoughts as “never perfect enough,”



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“never successful enough,” and “never certain enough.” In our culture we seem to be hyper-aware of what we don’t have instead of being keenly aware of what we do have. We constantly assess ourselves in comparison to others in terms of our lives, marriages, families, jobs, wealth, and more. We spend “inordinate amounts of time calculating how much we have, want, and don’t have, and how much everyone else has, need and wants.” This feeling of scarcity is pervasive in our society and it is shame based. Healing from it requires vulnerability.

Vulnerability Is Not Weakness

The primary myth around vulnerability is that it is equal to weakness. Brené says that it is actually the opposite of weakness. She defines vulnerability as “uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure.” “There’s no equation where taking risks, braving uncertainty, and opening ourselves up to emotional exposure equals weakness.”

Most of us have spent our entire lives believing that vulnerability and weakness are synonyms. They are not, and to believe so is to risk sacrificing a meaningful and purposeful life.

Putting our ideas, work, creations, products, or thoughts out into the world with total uncertainty as to how they will be accepted is vulnerability. Vulnerability should not be confused with failure. If we refuse to embrace vulnerability for what it truly is and see it as weakness, we lose an “essential emotional part of our lives.”

Opening up and being vulnerable allows us to “reignite our passion and purpose” in any endeavor, be it personal or professional. Showing up, daring to take a chance when failure is a possibility is not weakness. “Vulnerability sounds like truth and feels like courage. Truth and courage aren’t always comfortable, but they’re never weakness.”

Shame Resilience Is Key

Brené tells readers that we cannot be vulnerable without first getting past shame. She calls this work “shame resilience” and it is “key to embracing our vulnerability.” Shame is the feeling that gets in the way when we become terrified of what other people may think of us. When we attach our self-worth to how our products, creations, or ideas are received by others, that is tied to shame. She says, “in simple terms, if they love it, you’re worthy; if they don’t, you’re worthless.”

When we attach our self-worth to the things we produce or create we become less inclined to share them at all or we edit them down to a less innovative or creative version that is safer. If we take the risk of putting the “juiciest” version of our work out there and it is met with scrutiny or rejection, we are utterly crushed. Our shame shuts us down and tells us that we never should have tried in the first place.

Shame resilience is a skillset. Learning and applying those skills allows us to overcome our shame, access our vulnerability, and reap the associated rewards. Strong shame resilience skills allow you to put your work out there without putting “your self-worth

on the table.” We all want people to admire, like, and respect our work, but when they don’t, shame resilience allows us to categorize that shortcoming properly as what we do, not who we are. Without our self-worth on the line, we are able to take greater risks, receive and give constructive feedback, be more engaged in our work, and be more tenacious in achieving our goals.

One of the key skills in overcoming shame is becoming aware of and quieting what Brené called “shame tapes.” These are the messages we play in our head when we struggle or work on something challenging. Our shame tapes tell us things like “no one cares about this topic” or “successful marketers don’t struggle like this.” If we “cultivate awareness about shame and name it and speak to it,” we render it powerless and can get on with “the business of truly living.”

Mind the Gap

There is a space between where we are as leaders, parents, or educators and where we want to be. Paying attention to and crossing over that gap requires us to show up in “new and uncomfortable ways” that are aligned with our values.

In the business world, there is always a strong focus on strategy and culture and the relationship between the two. Brené defines strategy as “the game plan” that maps out where an organization, group, or team wants to go and how they are going to get there. A culture is “less about what we want to achieve and more about who we are.” In order to develop strategies that transform, we have to take a hard, uncomfortable look at our cultural values. We have to look in that gap between our best intentions and “how we actually live, feel, behave, and think.”

Disengagement is often the root issue keeping a community, organization, or team from stepping over the gap. When leaders do not practice what they preach, followers become disengaged. We feel lost and void of purpose. When the things we do and say and feel are “routinely in conflict with the expectation we set in our culture, disengagement is inevitable.” The goal is not perfection. Mistakes are to be expected and to be accepted.

What we do when those mistakes happen is what makes the difference between minding the gap and falling into it. Connection and engagement are daring strategies that require us to pay attention to the space between where we are standing and where we want to end up. Implementing daring strategies helps us develop daring cultures that foster engagement and ultimately, “transform the way we parent, educate, and lead.”

Rehumanizing Education and Work Through Leadership

Brené defines a leader as “anyone who holds her- or himself accountable for finding potential in people and processes.” The word leader does not refer to “a position, status, or number of direct reports.” Parents, teachers, community volunteers, and CEOs are all leaders who can dare greatly.

In order for leaders to “reignite creativity, innovation, and



If a leader does not know how to recognize and combat shame and fear, the entire organization can suffer horribly before outward signs are seen.

learning” they have to have tough conversations that bring awareness, language, and understanding to the topics of vulnerability and shame. These conversations “shine light in the dark corners” and once they are illuminated, going back to the way things were is virtually impossible. Leaders can and must “rehumanize education and work” to realize a vision.

“Engagement, innovation, creativity, productivity, and trust” are all susceptible to the crushing blows caused by shame and fear. If a leader does not know how to recognize and combat shame and fear, the entire organization can suffer horribly before any outward signs are seen.

Shame does damage quietly, behind the scenes, escaping the notice of almost everyone until it is too late. Casual observations, like walking around the office or school, rarely uncover a shame problem unless the problem is already “acute.”

For example, if a manager scolds an employee in the hallway for all to witness, that is a sign of a long-standing and serious shame problem. “Blaming, gossiping, favoritism, name-calling, and harassment” are all symptoms of a shame-based culture. Most of the time, it isn’t so obvious and requires the assessment of a leader who knows the less obvious signs that are problematic and suggestive of a shame problem.

Schools are breeding grounds for shame. In Brené’s shame research, 85% of the men and women interviewed “could recall a school incident from their childhood that was so shaming, it changed how they thought of themselves as learners.” Even in adulthood, some of the participants could recall in great detail a specific incident where they were told or made to feel that they were not good at a particular pursuit. Brené calls these creativity scars and they stay with us always, unless we banish them.

The workplace has similar shame-related struggles. Bullying, humiliation, threats, public reprimands, and belittling reward systems are all indications that a work culture is mired with shame. Leaders need to take immediate and direct action when a “shame infestation” is discovered.

Brené recommends four strategies to build shame-resilient schools and workplaces.

- Support leaders who “walk the walk.” These leaders dare greatly, encourage and help facilitate open and truthful conversations about the difficult topic of shame, and work to cultivate a shame-free culture.
- Engage in a conscious effort to seek out where shame-based tactics are being employed within the organization. Assess how co-workers, leaders, and classmates interact

with each other. Look in the dark corners and shine light on the shame that is hiding there.

- Managers and leaders should cultivate engagement by normalizing the discussion of and elimination of shame. Ask people to share their struggles and look for commonalities with how those struggles are dealt with or experienced.
- All employees should be trained on “the differences between shame and guilt” and on giving and receiving feedback that is shame-free and focused on growth and engagement.

We are living in a time of heavy uncertainty. There is a veritable laundry list of huge worries and big picture concerns that are impacting every one of us in ways seen and unseen. Brené’s twelve years of research in the areas of shame and vulnerability are more relevant now than ever. *Daring Greatly* is a map that anyone can read to navigate these rocky waters. Educators, leaders, community groups, congregations, and parents stand to benefit from the advice uncovered in Brené’s research-based writing.

She likens our business and personal lives to an arena. We can either sit in the stands, casting judgement on those who dare to duke it out, or we can enter the arena ourselves. Brené says of parenting, “Raising children who are hopeful and who have the courage to be vulnerable means stepping back and letting them experience disappointment, deal with conflict, learn how to assert themselves, and have the opportunity to fail. If we’re always following our children into the arena, hushing the critics, and assuring their victory, they’ll never learn that they have the ability to dare greatly on their own.”

The message for all is clear. Getting into the game of life fully and wholeheartedly takes courage, strength, and a willingness to be vulnerable. If we wait for the “perfect time” or until we are “bulletproof” to dare greatly, we are at risk of missing out on all of the greatness available to us in life. Our imperfection and our fallibility make us human, not flawed.

Daring Greatly helps us realize that we have to show up and let the world see us, totally and completely.