

BRAVE WORK. TOUGH CONVERSATIONS. WHOLE HEARTS.

DARE TO LEAD

By Brene Brown

"You can't get to courage without rumbling with vulnerability. Embrace the suck" (Brown, 2018, p. 2).

SUMMARY

Brown (2018) a leader in the field of psychology, is well known for studying shame and its effect on the human psyche. In her newest novel, she shares the learning she has accumulated over twenty years of research to provide practical, actionable steps to become a daring leader. Throughout the book, Brown (2018) describes the language, skills and tools needed to address barriers, to encourage curiosity and to show up during tough moments and conversations. Brown (2018) says that in order for us to be brave we must learn to be vulnerable - we must take off the armor we wear to discern our own motivations and intentions. We must practice self-love and self-awareness to respond to our fear in ways that serve u (Brown, 2018). Finally, Brown (2018) advocates that courage is contagious, creating these movements within our organizations is possible when others are seen, heard, respected and valued.



Daring Leaders:

Rumble with
Vulnerability

PART ONE

Live Into Their
Values

PART TWO

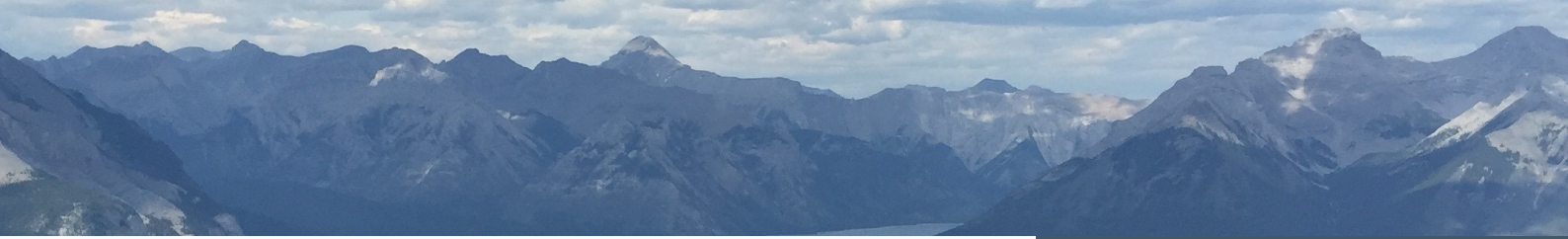
Engage in
Braving Trust

PART THREE

Learn to Rise

PART FOUR

Check out the Dare to Lead hub at daretolead.brenebrown.com for workbooks, videos, assessments and more to get the most out of this read!



Part One: Rumbling with Vulnerability

SECTION ONE: THE MOMENT AND THE MYTHS

The moments where we feel uncertainty, take risks, or experience emotional exposure is when we feel most vulnerable (Brown, 2018, p. 19). As Brown (2018) says, vulnerability is "having the courage to show up when you can't control the outcome" (p. 20). In this section, Brown (2018) takes the opportunity to address the myths that arise when talking about vulnerability, they are: that vulnerability is weakness, that we can choose to opt-out of being vulnerable, that we can do the job alone, that we can change or transform vulnerability to avoid uncertainty or discomfort, that we must trust before we can vulnerable and lastly that being vulnerable means we must disclose personal experiences (p. 23 - 34).

To "rumble with vulnerability" means to enter a conversation, discussion or meeting with your team with the commitment that you will lean into being vulnerable, you will be curious and ask questions, and you will be committed to problem-solving - either sticking it out for as long as you need to or taking the opportunity to ask the group to "circle back" to the discussion after some time alone to think (Brown, 2018). Brown (2018) suggests that before your team rumbles, you should create a "safe container", an environment where each member of the team acknowledges what they need to feel open and safe throughout the discussion.

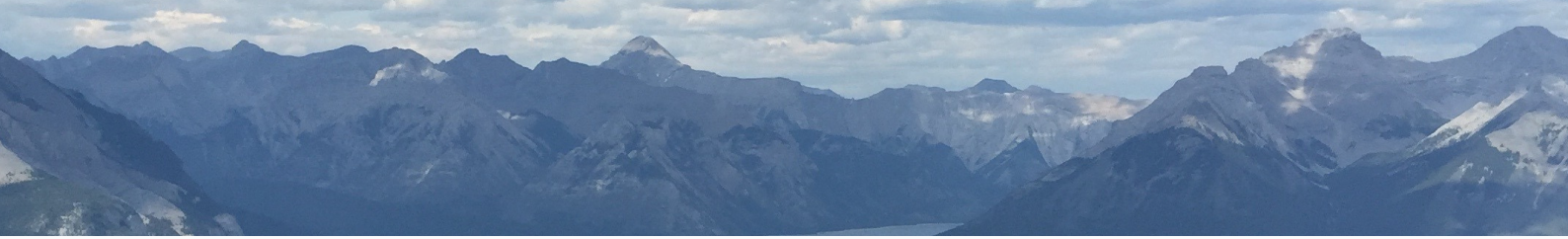
When examining the qualities that create a great a leader, such as adaptability, problem-solving, resilience, etcetera, we find that they have this in common - vulnerability lies at their heart (Brown, 2018).

SECTION TWO: THE CALL TO COURAGE

"Clear is kind. Unclear is unkind" (Brown, 2018, p. 48). Brown (2018) starts the chapter with this simple and yet often overlooked truth. She explains that often times when we are trying to mitigate conflict or soften the blow, we tell half-truths or lies to make others feel better, when in fact we are partly doing it because it makes ourselves feel better or because it is easier (Brown, 2018). When rumbling, instead of shaming or blaming, Brown (2018) encourages readers to look inward, as she quotes Joseph Cambell "the cave you fear to enter holds the treasure that you seek" (p. 52). By examining our own thoughts, fears and intentions we can move forward in a way that is in line with our values, which allows us to serve others (Brown, 2018).

To rumble is
to lean into
being
vulnerable, to
be curious,
and to be
committed to
problem
solving.





"We must take off the armor, put down the weapons, show up, and let ourselves be seen" (Brown, 2018, p. 78).

SECTION TWO: THE CALL TO COURAGE CONT...

Throughout the chapter, Brown (2018) describes some of the tools that have helped her team rumble, including: permission slips, setting boundaries, identifying key learnings, a specific meeting minutes process, and a sharing model called the "turn and learn". Brown (2018) shares with readers anecdotal stories about her own (and other's) struggles to choose courage over comfort in leading their teams through difficult times. Above all, Brown (2018) urges "leaders must either invest a reasonable amount of time attending to fears and feelings, or squander an unreasonable amount of time trying to manage ineffective and unproductive behaviour" (p. 67).




SECTION THREE: THE ARMORY

Brown (2018) calls on the reader to make the choice to engage in wholeheartedness, to make the decision to live in a way that is courageous, connected and compassionate. To do this, we must unarmour our hearts. If we close our hearts off to the world, we are able to keep out the negative, but we also lock out the positive too (Brown, 2018). Brown says "our ego will do almost anything to avoid or minimize the discomfort associated with feeling vulnerable or even curious because it's too risky" (2018, p. 74). Brown (2018) explains that when we are disconnected from our emotions we lose control because we have difficulty discerning the physical feelings that are connected to our emotions. Alternatively, when we are connected to our emotions, we are more empathetic, resilient and show a greater sense of self-compassion (Brown, 2018). To live wholeheartedly, we must believe that we are worthy, that we are enough, that we are capable (Brown, 2018).

"The problem is that when we imprison the heart, we kill courage" (Brown, 2018, p. 73).

Throughout this chapter, Brown (2018) explains sixteen examples of armoured leadership, as well as what a daring leader response, would look like instead. Some examples are:

1. "Driving perfectionism and fostering fear of failure" versus "modelling and encouraging healthy striving, empathy, and self-compassion" (Brown, 2018, p. 76-77).
2. "Working from scarcity and squandering opportunities for joy and recognition" versus "practicing gratitude and celebrating milestones and victories" (Brown, 2018, p. 76-77).



"Empathy is not connecting to an experience. Empathy is connecting to the emotions that underpin an experience" (Brown, 2018, p. 118).

SECTION FOUR: SHAME AND EMPATHY

Brown (2018) begins this chapter with a summary of the extensive research she has done around shame. Here, she mentions the 1-2-3's of shame including that; we all have shame - it is a universal emotion, people do not like to talk about shame (they very mention of it makes them uncomfortable), and last, if we don't talk about shame it assumes more control over our lives (Brown, 2018). As she describes it, shame is "the intensely painful feeling or experience that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love, belonging, and connection" (Brown, 2018, p. 126). Furthermore, Brown (2018) argues that we often use the words shame, guilt, humiliation and embarrassment interchangeably, but that they are vastly different in terms of our emotional and physical reaction to each. The self-talk that occurs when we feel shame versus guilt is something like this: when we feel guilty we equate it to "I did something bad" but, when we feel shame we tell ourselves "I am bad" (Brown, 2018, p. 128). Acting out of shame can cause us to put on our armour, or in other words, to act from an armoured leadership standpoint.

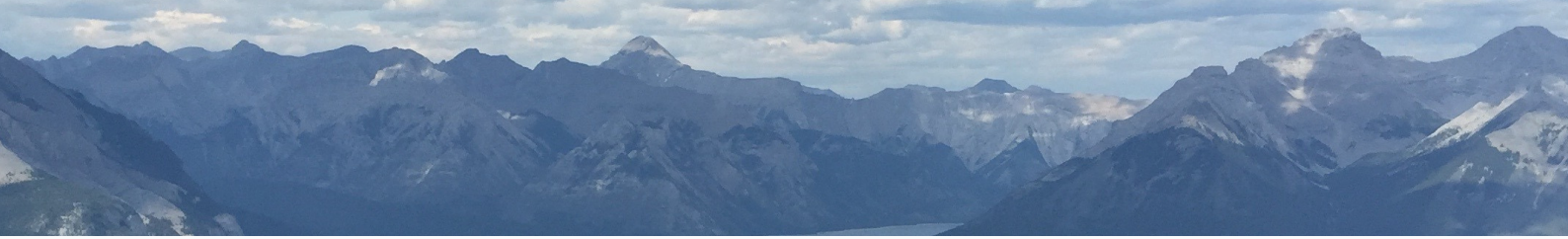
Brown (2018) points out that if shame is visible within the workplace it poses a serious threat to the culture of the organization, however, shame often is acted out in stealthier ways, including perfectionism, favouritism, harassment, bullying, etcetera. While shame resistance is not possible, shame resilience offers us a chance to act and respond authentically when we feel shame, it allows us to build empathy (Brown, 2018).

Brown (2018) explains that "empathy is one of the linchpins of cultures built on connection and trust - it's also an essential ingredient for teams who take risks and show up for rumbles" (p. 136). Empathy is the foundation on which strong connections are built, it is a response "to the emotions that underpin an experience" (Brown, 2018, p. 140). Empathy is not about fixing a problem or making it better, it is about understanding the vulnerability of another person and responding to it with courage and compassion.

Here, the author describes five empathy skills that increase trust and connection:

1. Practice perspective taking: "perspective taking requires becoming the learner, not the knower" (Brown, 2018, p. 144).
2. Be nonjudgemental, building a strong sense of self-worth and confidence will aid us in this (Brown, 2018).
3. "Understand another person's feelings" (Brown, 2018, p. 146).
4. "Communicate your understanding of that person's feelings" (Brown, 2018, p. 146).
5. Mindfulness - pay attention to your own feelings, self-talk, and body language while responding to others (Brown, 2018).

Brown (2018) asserts that responding to others with empathy is a skill that can be built with practice, we simply need to be persistent in our efforts.



"Self-awareness and self-love matter. Who we are is how we lead" (Brown, 2018, p. 165).

Part Two: Living Into Our Values

"Daring leaders who live into their values are never silent about hard things" (Brown, 2-18, p. 184).

SECTION FIVE: CURIOSITY AND GROUNDED CONFIDENCE

As we learn, practice, and make mistakes when we rumble with tough situations and decisions we begin to build what Brown (2018) refers to as grounded confidence. This confidence is built upon our own self-awareness as well as our experiences. As Brown (2018) says, rumbling with vulnerability is "the fundamental skill of courage-building" (p. 166). She reminds her readers that "easy learning does not build strong skills" and that it will take rumble skills, curiosity, and practice to build grounded confidence (Brown 2018, p. 170). To help her readers learn and develop rumble skills, the author provides sentence starters and questions such as "the story that I make up.." or "tell me more" (Brown, 2018, p. 172). Staying curious is what enables us to stay with the rumble even if it feels difficult or uncomfortable (Brown, 2018).



This chapter explores the importance of knowing and clarifying your values as tools for strength and guidance when rumbling. We must do more than simply proclaim our values, we must live them (Brown, 2018).

"We are clear about what we believe and hold important, and we take care that our intentions, words, thoughts, and behaviours align with those beliefs" (Brown, 2018, p. 186).

In order to live within our values, Brown (2018) suggests that we contemplate and ruminate on them, to define what is really most important to us. We must be able to name our values (Brown, 2018). Included in both the book and the free downloadable workbook are a list of over 100 values. Brown (2018) suggests you narrow yours down to the two most important to you. To live within our values, to exemplify them, is to act with integrity. Brown (2018) defines integrity as "choosing what's right over what's fun, fast, or easy; and it's practicing your values, not just professing them" (Brown, 2018, p. 189).



THE BRAVING INVENTORY

Boundaries

Reliability

Accountability

Vault

Integrity

Nonjudgement

Generosity

Part Three: Braving Trust


Trust is undoubtedly one of the most important foundational aspects of any relationship, however talking about trust - or a lack thereof is difficult and it's for this reason that it's often avoided (Brown, 2018). Brown (2018) comes up with an inventory for trust that allows us to have conversations about trust, or possibly a lack thereof, without attacking character and that support real change. Brown (2018) calls it the "BRAVING inventory" and includes boundaries, reliability, accountability, vault, integrity, nonjudgement and generosity as elements of trustworthiness. Brown (2018) describes the inventory saying "the intention behind the BRAVING inventory is a tool for creating time, space and intention to talk about trust in a way that is productive and actionable. It's a rumble tool, a guide, and a touchstone" (p. 233).

The author suggests that this tool could also be used as a self-assessment to build self-trust and increase our confidence.

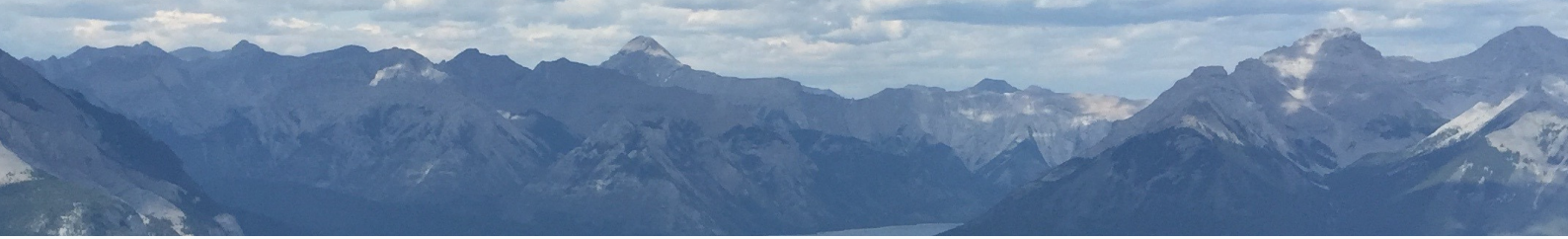
Part Four: Learning to Rise

After reviewing some of Brown's work, you will find this phrase comes up frequently "the story that I am telling myself..." (Brown, 2018, p. 247). Brown (2018) suggests that in order to learn how to fly, we must also learn how to land, we must learn to be resilient. She insists that the phrase mentioned above comes up consistently in her data, and that it is oft used by those who are extremely resilient (Brown, 2018).

Brown (2018) recommends a three step process to "learn to rise", she says: notice when your emotions are rising and question yourself as to why, try to discern the root or cause, notice your body's response and engage in any activity (deep breathing, meditating) that will bring it back down, and finally, rumble with the story that you have told yourself. Additionally, she gives some tips on how to rumble with a story with others.



"Choose courage over comfort. Choose whole hearts over armor. And choose the great adventure of being brave and afraid. At the exact same time" (Brown, 2018, p. 272).



CRITICAL REFLECTION

Brown (2018) echoes many of the sentiments shared in her previous work in this novel on daring leadership. An undeniable advantage is that Brown has had several years of experience in researching the psychology behind vulnerability and shame, and has had the opportunity to work individuals who lead majorly successful organizations. She has had time and resources to test her theories in organizations with different mandates across varied industries including technology, banking and manufacturing. Brown (2018) pushes readers to self-analyze their own motivations and processes to determine how their “stealth intentions” (as she calls them) serve their purpose, and through her examples, she leads us to believe that they are only getting in the way. Through understanding how to lean into tough conversations/situations, live within our values, and engage others in this work in an environment that is safe and respectful she contends that we have the ability to encourage others to be courageous as well.

There are links to workbooks on the Dare to Lead hub that indicate that this work can be used in schools, allowing staff to take on this work together. Certainly, it is possible for one person to pave the way, however, the impacts of a program such as this would have a greater effect if carried out on a larger scale. As teachers, we have the ability to model these skills for our students, to help them develop communication skills that allow them to live within their values, ask for what they need, and to communicate with others respectfully. This is not a one size fits all approach, as it calls the reader to determine their values and to engage in the work, insisting that the only way we will learn is by doing.

KEY CONCEPTS

- We must feel vulnerable in order to be brave, and we need brave leadership to make tough choices.
- Rumbling means to lean into discussions or situations that call us to be vulnerable, curious, and to listen with an open heart (Brown, 2018)
- Rumbling with vulnerability, living into your values, braving trust, and learning to rise are skill sets that can be learned and practiced (Brown, 2018)
- Self-awareness and self-love affect who we are and how we lead (Brown, 2018).
- Having courage in enacting these skills can inspire others to adopt this way of thinking too.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

Think of a time when you had a conflict with a colleague, now that you know more about rumbling with vulnerability, how might that conversation be different?

How might adopting something like the TASC (Task, Accountability, Success, Checklist - see page 103) look in your workplace? How would it change communication?

What are your top two values? What are the values of your staff as a whole? Do they align, and if so, how?

Would you consider reading this book as a book club with your staff?

When engaging in self-talk, what are your mantras? What do you tell yourself when you have made a mistake that feels like it can't be fixed?

Reference

Brown, B. (2018). *Dare to lead: brave work, tough conversations, whole hearts*. New York: Random House.

Christensen, M. Photographer. All photos used in this document are Megan's personal images.