Leading with Vulnerability

Presentation Outline

Vulnerability is not winning or losing. It’s having the courage to show up when you can’t control the outcome.

- Brené Brown

Brené Brown YouTube clip: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZkDaKKkFi6Y&feature=emb_logo

Think of the best leader you have worked with (ESA or non)

- What did you appreciate about them?
- What did they do to make you feel confident and comfortable?
- Much of what you admired about them is their vulnerability

What does it mean to “Lead with Vulnerability”? Why is it hard for leaders to be vulnerable?

- Vulnerability in leaders is often thought of as a weakness
- Leaders feel a constant pressure to perform
- Leaders “should” be confident, strong, and have vision
- Vulnerability does not mean being weak or submissive. It means replacing “professional distance and cool” with facing risk, uncertainty, and emotional exposure
- Authenticity and vulnerability are synonymous
- When showing vulnerability you’re saying “it’s ok to be who you are”

What are examples of vulnerability in leadership (or in general)?

- Being able to see through the eyes of the people you lead
- Seeing people as human beings, not just worker bees
- Admit that you don’t have all the answers
- Active listener
- Emotional intelligence
- Caring about your people outside of work/ESA
  - I.e. checking in with a colleague who has a sick child, asking for help, taking responsibility for something that went wrong

Benefits to Vulnerable Leadership

- Meaningful connections
  - Form more genuine connections – even if it is uncomfortable at times
- Greater Innovation
  - Leads to growth-mindset culture, encourages employees/members to move out of their comfort zone and share new ideas
- Accepting help
Leaders often find it hard to be vulnerable and ask for help.

- **Decreased Stress**
  - Expressing vulnerability can allow people to talk more freely about topics that may have been avoided in the past, increased openness/decreased tension

- **Greater Self-Awareness**
- **Identify Issues Faster**
  - People are more likely to come to a leader who is open with issues than someone who is cold and closed off

### Why is Human Connection Missing?

- Leaders are often taught or think they should keep a distance and project a certain image
- May disclose vulnerability to a spouse or friend behind closed doors but reject it within an organizational setting
- Brené Brown research shows that onlookers (members, employees) are able to register lack of authenticity subconsciously

### Comfort and Vulnerability

- Why do we feel more comfortable around someone who is authentic and vulnerable?
  - We are sensitive to signs of trustworthiness
- Culture of forgiveness

### Servant Leadership

- What is servant leadership?
  - Leaders who primarily focus on the growth and well-being of the people and communities they serve
- Why are leaders who exhibit servant leadership more likely to be trusted and yield more positive results?
- Examples: Martin Luther King Jr., Mother Theresa, Ghandi

### Embracing Imperfection

- Embrace your own imperfection and be brave enough to be vulnerable and share areas where you may need help
- Embrace other’s imperfections – learn where others thrive and use that to build the best outcome

### Key Practices

- Say “I don’t know” and “I need help”
  - Shows courage and humility
  - Leaders aren’t expected to know everything and shouldn’t try to have all the answers
  - Allows for open discussion, sharing of opinions, and a culture of finding the right answer
- Accept when you’ve made a mistake and share what you’ve learned
  - When we don’t accept vulnerability we try to hide mistakes or look for someone else to blame
- Embrace Conflict
  o Accepting mistakes and learning and sharing them builds trust, allowing other opinions on what should be done differently builds trust
- Say you are scared
  o Dealing with conflict requires you to step out of your comfort zone and show vulnerability when dealing with it
  o Sharing our fears with those close to us makes us feel better when hearing that we aren’t alone and that others struggle with the same feelings
  o Shows a real emotion – courage to accept the reality of your situation
- Be Flexible to Change your Opinion
  o Staying rigid in our ideas means we disregard others’ feelings and show that we don’t care what they think
  o Listening to ideas, asking open-ended questions, and being flexible to go with the best option even if it’s not your own shows strength in leadership
- Share you are a work in progress
  o We all always have more to learn – no leader is perfect or knows everything
  o Sharing new skills you are working on doesn’t show what we lack but that we are open to trying new things (and maybe failing)

Resources:

**Brené Brown (brenebrown.com)**

Books used for this presentation:

- *Daring Greatly*
- *Dare to Lead*

Activity:

Vulnerability worksheet – have a section to write down your vulnerabilities about your position in ESA or work (whatever). What are some things that scare you? (Examples: public speaking, not being good with technology, getting in over your head with a project). Next, write out the things you know are your strengths (detailed, creative, etc). Looking at your vulnerabilities, think about how you can tackle those by asking for help – who in your state or personal network can help you? Do you have a friend who is a tech wiz and set up your Google Drive? Do you have a spouse who you can practice your speeches in front of? Work on building up your team so you know who to go to when you run into moments of vulnerability.

Activity:

The Square Squad (from *Dare to Lead*): Get a 1” x 1” piece of paper and write down the names of the people whose opinions really matter to you. It needs to be small to force you to edit. How to choose people: the people on your list should love you not despite your vulnerability and imperfections but because of them. They should not be “yes” people – they should be people who respect you enough to tell you how it really is and not just agree with your ideas or actions. Once you have your list, consider
reaching out to those people and thanking them for being someone you can be vulnerable with and whose opinion you value. This is also a list of people you know you can always go to when you are stuck.