

# Daring Greatly

**Title:** Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead

**Author:** Brene Brown

**Copyright:** 2012

## Book Description:

Every day we experience the uncertainty, risks, and emotional exposure that define what it means to be vulnerable, or to dare greatly. Whether the arena is a new relationship, an important meeting, our creative process, or a difficult family conversation, we must find the courage to walk into vulnerability and engage with our whole hearts. In Daring Greatly, Dr. Brown challenges everything we think we know about vulnerability. Based on twelve years of research, she argues that vulnerability is not weakness, but rather our clearest path to courage, engagement, and meaningful connection.

## Book Quotes:

Vulnerability is not weakness, and the uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure we face every day are not optional. Our only choice is a question of engagement. Our willingness to own and engage with our vulnerability determines the depth of our courage and the clarity of our purpose; the level to which we protect ourselves from being vulnerable is a measure of our fear and disconnection. Location 96

When we spend our lives waiting until we're perfect or bulletproof before we walk into the arena, we ultimately sacrifice relationships and opportunities that may not be recoverable, we squander our precious time, and we turn our backs on our gifts, those unique contributions that only we can make. Location 99

The surest thing I took away from my BSW, MSW, and Ph.D. in social work is this: Connection is why we're here. We are hardwired to connect with others, it's what gives purpose and meaning to our lives, and without it there is suffering. I wanted to develop research that explained the anatomy of connection. Location 153

Wholehearted living is about engaging in our lives from a place of worthiness. It means cultivating the courage, compassion, and connection to wake up in the morning and think, no matter what gets done and how much is left undone, I am enough. It's going to bed at night thinking, Yes, I am imperfect and vulnerable and sometimes afraid, but that doesn't change the truth that I am also brave and worthy of love and belonging. Location 178

What we know matters, but who we are matters more. Being rather than knowing requires showing up and letting ourselves be seen. It requires us to dare greatly, to be vulnerable. The first step of that journey is understanding where we are, what we're up against, and where we need to go. Location 256

Whether true or not, that thought of not enough occurs to us automatically before we even think to question or examine it. We spend most of the hours and the days of our lives hearing, explaining, complaining, or worrying about what we don't have enough of....Before we even sit up in bed, before our feet touch the floor, we're already inadequate, already behind, already losing, already lacking something. And by the time we go to bed at

night, our minds are racing with a litany of what we didn't get, or didn't get done, that day. We go to sleep burdened by those thoughts and wake up to that reverie of lack....This internal condition of scarcity, this mind-set of scarcity, lives at the very heart of our jealousies, our greed, our prejudice, and our arguments with life.... Location 348

The counterapproach to living in scarcity is not about abundance. In fact, I think abundance and scarcity are two sides of the same coin. The opposite of "never enough" isn't abundance or "more than you could ever imagine." The opposite of scarcity is enough, or what I call Wholeheartedness. As I explained in the Introduction, there are many tenets of Wholeheartedness, but at its very core is vulnerability and worthiness: facing uncertainty, exposure, and emotional risks, and knowing that I am enough. Location 391

The greatest casualties of a scarcity culture are our willingness to own our vulnerabilities and our ability to engage with the world from a place of worthiness. Location 398

The perception that vulnerability is weakness is the most widely accepted myth about vulnerability and the most dangerous. Location 409

Vulnerability isn't good or bad: It's not what we call a dark emotion, nor is it always a light, positive experience. Vulnerability is the core of all emotions and feelings. To feel is to be vulnerable. To believe vulnerability is weakness is to believe that feeling is weakness. To foreclose on our emotional life out of a fear that the costs will be too high is to walk away from the very thing that gives purpose and meaning to living. Location 414

Vulnerability is the birthplace of love, belonging, joy, courage, empathy, and creativity. It is the source of hope, empathy, accountability, and authenticity. If we want greater clarity in our purpose or deeper and more meaningful spiritual lives, vulnerability is the path. Location 420

I define vulnerability as uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure. Location 423

It starts to make sense that we dismiss vulnerability as weakness only when we realize that we've confused feeling with failing and emotions with liabilities. If we want to reclaim the essential emotional part of our lives and reignite our passion and purpose, we have to learn how to own and engage with our vulnerability and how to feel the emotions that come with it. For some of us, it's new learning, and for others it's relearning. Either way, the research taught me that the best place to start is with defining, recognizing, and understanding vulnerability. Location 433

Vulnerability sounds like truth and feels like courage. Truth and courage aren't always comfortable, but they're never weakness. Location 452

And the answer that appeared over and over in all of our efforts to better understand vulnerability? Naked. Vulnerability is like being naked onstage and hoping for applause rather than laughter. It's being naked when everyone else is fully clothed. It feels like the naked dream: You're in the airport and you're stark naked. Location 466

Here's the crux of the struggle: I want to experience your vulnerability but I don't want to be vulnerable. Vulnerability is courage in you and inadequacy in me. I'm drawn to your vulnerability but repelled by mine. Location 502

When we pretend that we can avoid vulnerability we engage in behaviors that are often inconsistent with who we want to be. Experiencing vulnerability isn't a choice—the only choice we have is how we're going to respond when we are confronted with uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure. Location 544

Vulnerability is based on mutuality and requires boundaries and trust. It's not oversharing, it's not purging, it's not indiscriminate disclosure, and it's not celebrity-style social media information dumps. Vulnerability is about sharing our feelings and our experiences with people who have earned the right to hear them. Being vulnerable and open is mutual and an integral part of the trust-building process. Location 553

Because sharing appropriately, with boundaries, means sharing with people with whom we've developed relationships that can bear the weight of our story. The result of this mutually respectful vulnerability is increased connection, trust, and engagement. Location 559

Vulnerability without boundaries leads to disconnection, distrust, and disengagement. Location 560

The good news is that the answers to these questions emerged from the data. The bad news is that it's a chicken-or-the-egg issue: We need to feel trust to be vulnerable and we need to be vulnerable in order to trust. Location 570

There is no trust test, no scoring system, no green light that tells us that it's safe to let ourselves be seen. The research participants described trust as a slow-building, layered process that happens over time. Location 572

Trust is a product of vulnerability that grows over time and requires work, attention, and full engagement. Trust isn't a grand gesture—it's a growing marble collection. Location 646

There's actually some very persuasive leadership research that supports the idea that asking for support is critical, and that vulnerability and courage are contagious. Location 662

Nothing has transformed my life more than realizing that it's a waste of time to evaluate my worthiness by weighing the reaction of the people in the stands. The people who love me and will be there regardless of the outcome are within arm's reach. This realization changed everything. That's the wife and mother and friend that I now strive to be. I want our home to be a place where we can be our bravest selves and our most fearful selves. Where we practice difficult conversations and share our shaming moments from school and work. I want to look at Steve and my kids and say, "I'm with you. In the arena. And when we fail, we'll fail together, while daring greatly." We simply can't learn to be more vulnerable and courageous on our own. Sometimes our first and greatest dare is asking for support. Location 692

The secret killer of innovation is shame. You can't measure it, but it is there. Every time someone holds back on a new idea, fails to give their manager much needed feedback, and is afraid to speak up in front of a client you can be sure shame played a part. That deep fear we all have of being wrong, of being belittled and of feeling less than, is what stops us taking the very risks required to move our companies forward. Location 786

Shame becomes fear. Fear leads to risk aversion. Risk aversion kills innovation. Location 792

Shame derives its power from being unspeakable. That's why it loves perfectionists—it's so easy to keep us quiet. If we cultivate enough awareness about shame to name it and speak to it, we've basically cut it off at the knees. Shame hates having words wrapped around it. If we speak shame, it begins to wither. Just the way exposure to light was deadly for the gremlins, language and story bring light to shame and destroy it. Location 808

I start every talk, article, and chapter on shame with the Shame 1-2-3s, or the first three things that you need to know about shame, so you'll keep listening: We all have it. Shame is universal and one of the most primitive human emotions that we experience. The only people who don't experience shame lack the capacity for empathy and human connection. Here's your choice: Fess up to experiencing shame or admit that you're a sociopath. Location 822

The less we talk about shame, the more control it has over our lives. Location 827

Here's the definition of shame that emerged from my research: Shame is the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging. Location 834

The majority of shame researchers and clinicians agree that the difference between shame and guilt is best understood as the difference between "I am bad" and "I did something bad." Location 856

Guilt is just as powerful as shame, but its influence is positive, while shame's is destructive. In fact, in my research I found that shame corrodes the very part of us that believes we can change and do better. Location 873

Shame thrives on secret keeping, and when it comes to secrets, there's some serious science behind the twelve-step program saying, "You're only as sick as your secrets." In a pioneering study, psychologist and University of Texas professor James Pennebaker and his colleagues studied what happened when trauma survivors—specifically rape and incest survivors—kept their experiences secret. The research team found that the act of not discussing a traumatic event or confiding it to another person could be more damaging than the actual event. Location 992

Conversely, when people shared their stories and experiences, their physical health improved, their doctor's visits decreased, and they showed significant decreases in their stress hormones. Location 996

Remembering that shame is the fear of disconnection—the fear that we're unlovable and don't belong—makes it easy to see why so many people in midlife overfocus on their children's lives, work sixty hours a week, or turn to affairs, addiction, and disengagement. We start to unravel. Location 1346

Perfectionism is not the same thing as striving for excellence. Perfectionism is not about healthy achievement and growth. Perfectionism is a defensive move. It's the belief that if we do things perfectly and look perfect, we can minimize or avoid the pain of blame, judgment, and shame. Location 1571

Perfectionism is not self-improvement. Perfectionism is, at its core, about trying to earn approval. Location 1574

Perfectionism is not the key to success. In fact, research shows that perfectionism hampers achievement. Location 1577

Connection is the energy that is created between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment. Location 1771

Belonging is the innate human desire to be part of something larger than us. Location 1772

When we teach or model to our children that vulnerability is dangerous and should be pushed away, we lead them directly into danger and disconnection. Location 1890

When it comes to vulnerability, connectivity means sharing our stories with people who have earned the right to hear them—people with whom we've cultivated relationships that can bear the weight of our story. Is there trust? Is there mutual empathy? Is there reciprocal sharing? Can we ask for what we need? These are the crucial connection questions. Location 1952

When I talk about cynicism, I don't mean healthy skepticism and questioning. I'm talking about the reflexive cynicism that leads to mindless responses like "That's so stupid," or "What a loser idea." Cool is one of the most rampant forms of cynicism. Whatever. Totally lame. So uncool. Who gives a shit? Among some folks it's

almost as if enthusiasm and engagement have become a sign of gullibility. Being too excited or invested makes you lame. A word that we've banned in our house along with loser and stupid. Location 2052

When we stop caring about what people think, we lose our capacity for connection. When we become defined by what people think, we lose our willingness to be vulnerable. If we dismiss all the criticism, we lose out on important feedback, but if we subject ourselves to the hatefulness, our spirits get crushed. It's a tightrope, shame resilience is the balance bar, and the safety net below is the one or two people in our lives who can help us reality-check the criticism and cynicism. Location 2071

The gap starts here: We can't give people what we don't have. Who we are matters immeasurably more than what we know or who we want to be. Location 2168

Before we start this chapter, I want to clarify what I mean by "leader." I've come to believe that a leader is anyone who holds her- or himself accountable for finding potential in people and processes. Location 2243

Blaming, gossiping, favoritism, name-calling, and harassment are all behavior cues that shame has permeated a culture. A more obvious sign is when shame becomes an outright management tool. Is there evidence of people in leadership roles bullying others, criticizing subordinates in front of colleagues, delivering public reprimands, or setting up reward systems that intentionally belittle, shame, or humiliate people? Location 2298

Here's the best way to think about the relationship between shame and blame: If blame is driving, shame is riding shotgun. Location 2377

Blame is simply the discharging of pain and discomfort. We blame when we're uncomfortable and experience pain—when we're vulnerable, angry, hurt, in shame, grieving. There's nothing productive about blame, and it often involves shaming someone or just being mean. Location 2383

A daring greatly culture is a culture of honest, constructive, and engaged feedback. Location 2404

The problem is straightforward: Without feedback there can be no transformative change. When we don't talk to the people we're leading about their strengths and their opportunities for growth, they begin to question their contributions and our commitment. Disengagement follows. Location 2408

Right off the bat, I believe that feedback thrives in cultures where the goal is not "getting comfortable with hard conversations" but normalizing discomfort. Location 2416

The research has made this clear: Vulnerability is at the heart of the feedback process. This is true whether we give, receive, or solicit feedback. And the vulnerability doesn't go away even if we're trained and experienced in offering and getting feedback. Experience does, however, give us the advantage of knowing that we can survive the exposure and uncertainty, and that it's worth the risk. Location 2453

Today, "Sitting on the same side of the table" is my metaphor for feedback. I used it to create my Engaged Feedback Checklist: I know I'm ready to give feedback when: I'm ready to sit next to you rather than across from you; I'm willing to put the problem in front of us rather than between us (or sliding it toward you); I'm ready to listen, ask questions, and accept that I may not fully understand the issue; I want to acknowledge what you do well instead of picking apart your mistakes; I recognize your strengths and how you can use them to address your challenges; I can hold you accountable without shaming or blaming you; I'm willing to own my part; I can genuinely thank you for your efforts rather than criticize you for your failings; I can talk about how resolving these challenges will lead to your growth and opportunity; and I can model the vulnerability and openness that I expect to see from you. Location 2489

Again, there's no question that feedback may be one of the most difficult arenas to negotiate in our lives. We should remember, though, that victory is not getting good feedback, avoiding giving difficult feedback, or avoiding the need for feedback. Instead it's taking off the armor, showing up, and engaging. Location 2518

*Note: should you wish to find any quote in its original context, the Kindle "location" is provided after each entry.*